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GREAT BOOKS



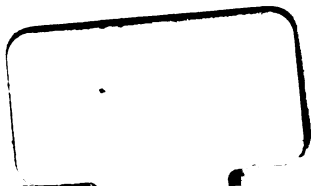
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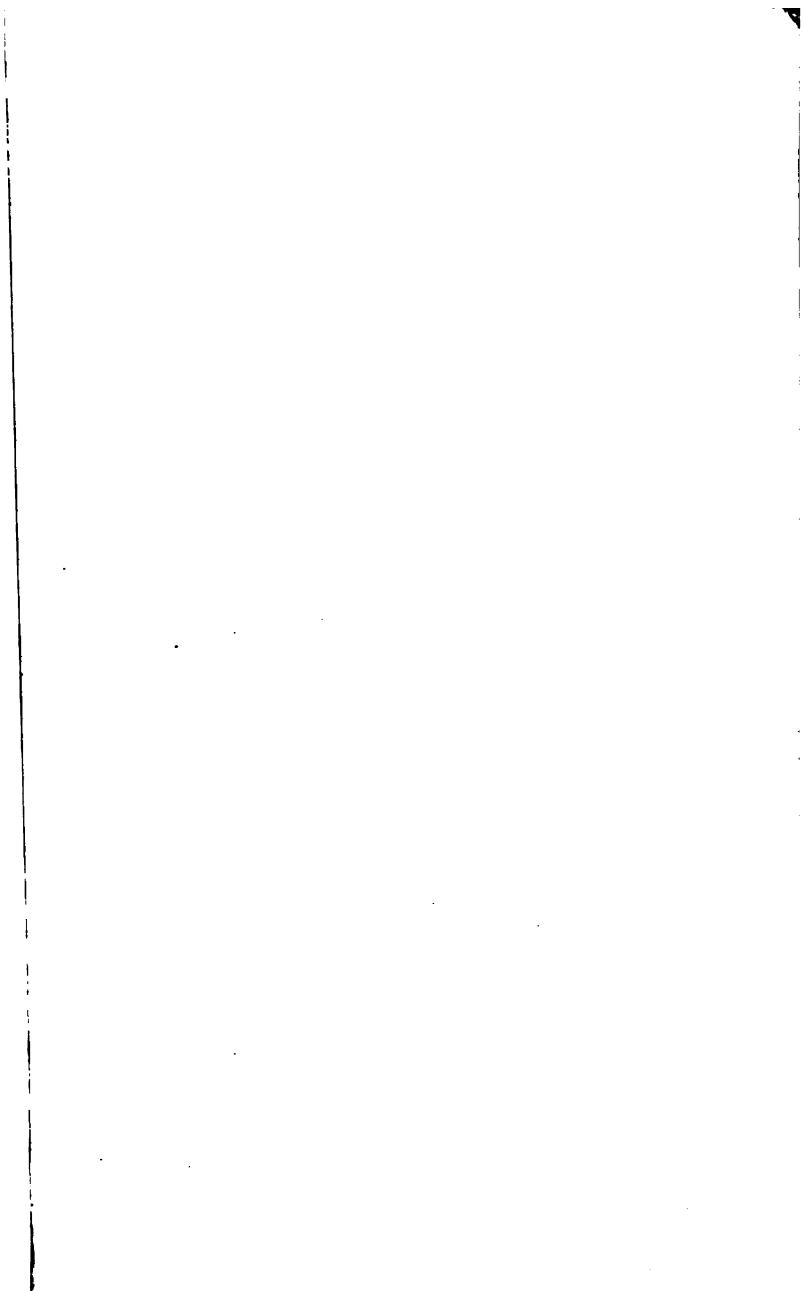
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BY

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DEAN OF CANTERBURY

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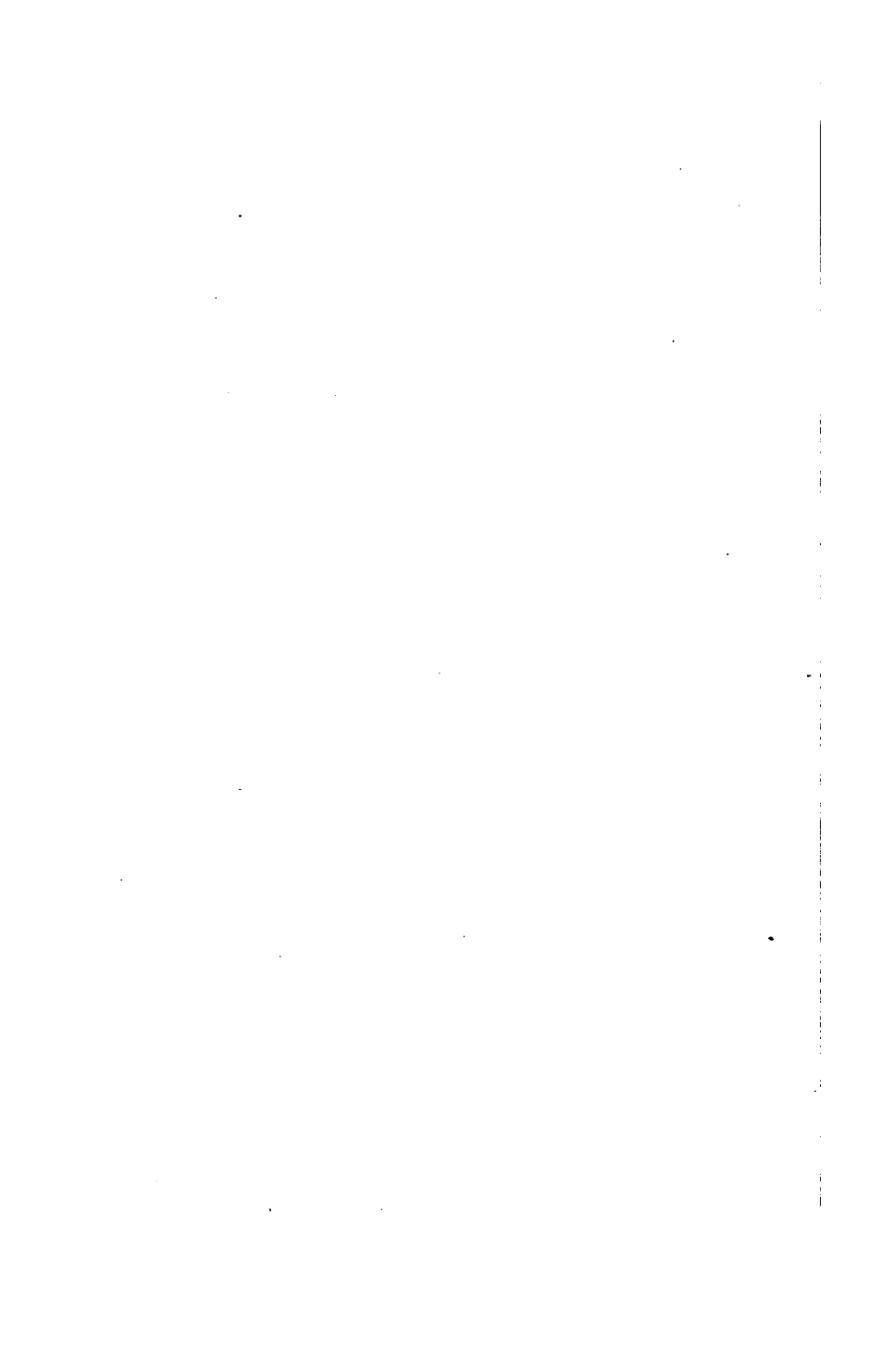
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GREAT BOOKS.

CHAPTER I.

GREAT BOOKS.

I AM asked to write some papers on the subject of "Great Books" in general, to be followed by special papers on such supreme writers as Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, and Bunyan. That such studies may be useful to the young, who desire the guidance of experience, I may fairly hope; and if I can impress upon the minds of serious learners the truths which I shall urge upon their attention, I feel no doubt at all that there may be some to whom I may thus be enabled to render a lifelong service. For—

I. The multiplication of books in these days is almost beyond calculation. In any

mixed society of educated people it is the exception to find that there are no authors present. Of clergymen who have reached a certain age the majority have published something, if it be no more than a volume of sermons. The output of fiction is so astonishingly large that we cannot but wonder who are the readers of the numberless ephemeral volumes that appear and "perish like the summer fly." It is said that the subterranean rooms of a well-known circulating library are crammed with tens of thousands of volumes, chiefly novels, for which, even when they have had a temporary vogue, there is no longer any sale. It is the inevitable fate of the immense majority of writers that their publications fall more or less dead from the press, and very soon

"May bind a book, may line a box,
May serve to curl a maiden's locks."

There are thousands of other books

which, though they are useful and profitable for a time, and accomplish their intended purpose, are then naturally superseded. For such literary productions their authors never expected more than a brief existence. Yet they have not been published to no purpose. They fall like the dead leaves of autumn; but just as the dead leaves have not lived in vain, since they serve to enrich the soil into which they perish, so the thoughts of myriads of men, though they possess no germ of immortality, do in their own limited degree furnish a contribution, however infinitesimal, to the intellectual life of each successive generation.

But if writers are thus abnormally numerous, what are we to say of *readers*? What is to be *their* guide in an age when “of making many books there is no end”? Do we not want a new Khalif Omar to make a vast conflagration of heaps of accumulated rubbish?

II. Among the ever-increasing multitude of books *many* are empty, commonplace, and platitudinous: others are positively dangerous and wicked books, though they, happily, are not numerous. And further than this, all books, as Mr. Ruskin says, may be classed as "books for the hour, or books for all time."

Now as the most general rules which I could give about reading, I should say to every young man or young woman, —

1. Make your deliberate choice, and do not attempt to read everything that comes in your way. It is not possible to know something about everything; it is rarely in our power to know everything about anything. But every one who aims at self-culture ought to have selected certain subjects about which he desires to be as well informed as his opportunities permit. Amid the vast accumulations of human knowledge there is not a single subject — not one period of history, not one sub-

dichotomy of any one science, not one department of archæology — which, if we desire to obtain a secure mastery of it, will not require the study of a lifetime. If any one wishes to be a student he must make up his mind not to attempt too much. He must set aside whole realms of knowledge as not coming within the personal range of his limited faculties and the short span of human existence.

2. Mere indiscriminate reading of any kind should be resolutely abjured. The hasty omnivorous swallowing of all kinds of intellectual pabulum will as certainly produce mental dyspepsia as thoughtless gluttony will ruin the physical digestion. Smatterings of unassimilated knowledge are responsible for that shallow conceit of opinionated infallibility which abounds in those schools where

“Blind and naked Ignorance
Delivers brawling judgments, unashamed,
On all things all day long.”

In no other way can we account for the prolific and portentous phenomenon, which we daily witness, of nescience taking itself for knowledge, and insolently denouncing what it is utterly incompetent to understand. We might imagine that the writings of those who address the world from no higher standpoint than that of

"I am Sir Oracle,
And when I ope my lips let no dog bark,"

could safely be left to perish of their own decay; nevertheless, the tone of confident assertion imposes on whole cliques and coteries of deluded adherents; and it is because they thus win credence that we so often see

"The meanest having power upon the highest,
And the high purpose broken by the worm."

3. A minute's glance at many books is quite sufficient to show a practised reader whether they contain anything that will or

will not be of use to him. If he sees, for instance, that they are written, as is the case with whole legions of books, from the standpoint of a stereotyped bigotry and an arrogant incompetence, he may without a qualm of conscience toss them into the benevolent capaciousness of his nearest waste-paper basket. To read useless, meaningless, tenth-rate books, written by men who make little popes of their own unprogressive opinions, by men whose incapacity is a sea without a bottom and without a shore — to read *any* books which are written without a conscience or an aim, is an inexcusable manslaughter upon time. It bears the same relation to real reading as indolent loafing does to healthy and vigorous exercise. The old advice, "*Lege, lege, aliquid haerebit,*" is very bad advice if it be meant to include dabbling in all kinds of literature. It is, however, true that even in books which are in the main worthless there are sometimes "two grains

of wheat" hid in whole bushels of chaff. If we have the skill to secure these two wheat-grains in a few moments they may be useful to us. But there are not many readers who have gained the power of thus eviscerating books at a glance.

4. Newspapers are in these days necessary. The air of the whole world now thrills with common sympathies because the railroad and the telegraph bring the most distant regions into close contact; and there cannot be a mountain ascent in Alaska, or a volcanic eruption in Java, or a balloon sighted in the Polar Circle, without our hearing of it almost immediately. We cannot be indifferent to the history of the contemporary world; yet the amount of time deplorably wasted by numberless readers in idly devouring scraps of disconnected and vapid intelligence is quite inconceivable. Such reading must surely be meant only for those who are

“Too weak to bear
The insupportable fatigue of thought,
And swallow therefore, without pause or choice,
The total grist, unsifted, husks and all.”

Ordinarily speaking, a glance of ten minutes, or even five minutes, at our daily newspaper will tell us all that we ought to know. It is, for instance, worse than useless to read through the squalid details of every police trial, or the nauseous revelations of divorce courts, or vague political conjectures, or the sensational items of “the silly season.” There are papers that seem to exist for no other purpose than “to chronicle small beer.” There are other papers, as Lord Coleridge said, “made up of personalities so trivial, that, prior to experience, one would have supposed they could not possibly have interested, for a single moment, in the faintest possible degree, any human being.” How can we have time to think, or leave a margin to our life, if we spend hours

every week in dabbling about in what Mr. Lowell called "the stagnant goose-ponds of village gossip"? Of what advantage can it be to know that yesterday "Mr. Brown's son swallowed a hickory nut" or "Mr. Jones's cart-wheel stuck in a mud rut"? How can we inhale healthy air if we are always living in the midst of what another American writer calls "the miasma which arises out of the shoreless lakes of human ditch-water"? "In a world of daily, nay, almost hourly, journalism," says Mr. Lowell again, "where every clever man, every man who thinks himself clever, or whom anybody else thinks clever, is called upon to deliver a judgment, point-blank and at the word of command, on every conceivable subject of human thought—or on what sometimes seems to him very much the same thing, on every inconceivable display of human *want* of thought—there is such a spendthrift waste of all those commonplaces which furnish the per-

mitted staple of public discourse, that there is little chance of beguiling a new tune out of the one-stringed instrument on which we have been thrumming so long." But when the "mems" and "items" and "pars" are full of gossip, scandal, and spite; when they are like the verminiferous dust in which are incubated the germs of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness—the less we notice them the better. They are undiluted poison to the healthy soul, which loves charity and truth.

5. There is one piece of advice which I would give with intense earnestness to all. It is this: Never be tempted by curiosity to read what you know to be a *bad* book, or what a very little reading *shows* you to be a bad book. Bad books—by which I do not mean merely ignorant and misleading books, but those which are prurient and corrupt—are the most fatal emissaries of the devil. They pollute with plague the moral atmosphere of the world.

Many and many a time a *good* book, read by a boy, has been the direct source of all his future success; has inspired him to attain and to deserve eminence; has sent him on the paths of discovery; has been as a sheet anchor to all that was noblest in his character; has contributed the predominant element to the usefulness and happiness of his whole life. Benjamin Franklin testified that a little tattered volume of "Essays to Do Good," by Cotton Mather, read when he was a boy, influenced the whole course of his conduct, and that if he had been a useful citizen "the public owes all the advantages of it to that little book." Jeremy Bentham said that the single phrase "the greatest good of the greatest number," caught at a glance in a pamphlet, directed the current of his thoughts and studies for life. The entire career of Charles Darwin was influenced by a book of travels which he read in early years. On the other hand,

it is fatally possible for any one—especially for any youth—to read himself to death in a bad book in five minutes. The well-known minister, John Angell James, narrated that, when he was at school, a boy lent him an impure book. He only read it for a few minutes; but even during those few minutes the poison flowed fatally into his soul, and became to him a source of bitterness and anguish for all his after years. The thoughts, images, and pictures thus glanced at haunted him all through life like foul spectres. Let no one indulge his evil curiosity under the notion that he is safe. “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.”

“Oh! who can hold a fire in his hand
By thinking on the frosty Caucasus?”

Were we not warned two thousand years ago that “he who toucheth pitch shall be defiled”? and three millenniums ago the

question was asked, "Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? or can one walk upon hot coals, and his feet not be scorched?"

6. What makes every form of bad reading such a murder of time and so entirely inexcusable is that the world abounds not only in good books, but in entire *domains* of good books. Even the "great books" of the world furnish us with an inexhaustible supply. A lifetime would barely suffice to master all the good books which exist in any noble and fruitful branch of study. If we were not such bad economists of happiness we should make better use of the joy and beneficence opened to us by some of these developments of human faculty. Many a man whose life is now dreary, burdensome, and pernicious, might, had he been wiser, have been able to say,—

"My mind to me a kingdom is,
Such perfect joy therein I find."

Many a sad and useless man might both have *been* good and *done* good,—might both have been as happy as human life permits and a source of happiness to others,—if he had learnt to take delight in the great thoughts of the wisest and holiest of mankind. There are boundless realms of beauty and of wonder and of power in the universe of God of which the intellect of the wise has learnt to decipher the meaning. There are priceless treasures full of wealth “more golden than gold” which are open even to the humblest and poorest. To neglect them is not only unwise, but pusillanimous. These days especially need courage and gladness. The struggle for existence grows every day more keen, and is a struggle between nations no less than between individuals. Amid the vast growth of populations; amid the increasing difficulties of earning an honest subsistence; amid the reactions of lassitude caused by the wear and

tear, the strain and stress, of daily life ; amid the depression and uncertainty created by the deepening complexity of problems yet unsolved, — we need every possible counteraction of irresolution, weariness, and gloom. The influence of great books would enable us, more perhaps than any other influence, to acquire our own souls in confidence and peace. “He who is his own monarch,” says Sir Thomas Browne, “contentedly sways the sceptre of himself, not envying the glory to crowned heads and the Elohim of the earth.”

7. I might well speak of the immeasurable blessings to which any one of us might attain from even a partial knowledge of Science or of Art, of which the greatest results and the most eternal principles are set before us in many books. But I will confine my remarks to the subject of General Literature. If Science teaches us respecting Nature and her forces, and Art unfolds to us

“ The shapes of things, their colours, lights and
shades,
Changes, surprises — and God made them all,”

Literature unfolds to us the deepest thoughts which can fill the great heart of humanity. We may, if we choose, find a purer and more exquisite delight in wise reading than in almost anything else. A few of the testimonies of eminent thinkers may help to bring this truth home to us. Cicero, the master of Roman eloquence, said that other studies are for one time, or one place, or one mood; but these studies are with us at home and abroad, in town or in the country, by day and by night, in youth and in old age; our consolation in days of sorrow, our exhilaration in hours of peace. Petrarch, when his friend the bishop, thinking that he was overworked, took away the key of his library, was restless and miserable the first day, had a bad headache the second, and was so ill by the third day that the bishop

in alarm returned the key, and let his friend read as much as he liked. "A good book," says Milton in his famous "Areopagitica," "is the precious lifeblood of a master-spirit, treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life." The historian Gibbon said that he would not exchange the love of reading for the Empire of India. "Books," says Cowper, —

"Are not seldom talismans and spells."

Wordsworth, after saying that

"Books, we know,
Are a substantial world, both pure and good,
Round these, with tendrils strong as flesh and blood,
Our pastime and our happiness will grow,"
adds,

"Nor can I not believe but that hereby
Great gains are mine ; for thus I live remote
From evil-speaking ; rancour, never sought,
Comes to me not ; malignant truth or lie.
Hence have I genial seasons, hence have I
Smooth passions, smooth discourse, and joyous
thought,
And thus from day to day my little boat
Rocks in its harbour, lodging peacefully."

And certainly among the poems of Southey which will live we should place the charming lines:—

“My days among the dead are past ;
 Around me I behold,
 Where'er these casual eyes are cast,
 The mighty minds of old.
 My never-failing friends are they
 With whom I converse day by day ;

With them I take delight in weal,
 And seek relief in woe :
 And while I understand and feel
 How much to them I owe,
 My cheeks have often been bedew'd
 With tears of thoughtful gratitude.”

8. To these testimonies of great poets I will add three remarkable passages from prose writers. My object is to impress on my readers, and especially on the young, a sense of the joy and safety which they may gain from the study of great books, and I therefore wish to quote to them the weightiest authorities.

1. Here, then, is a singularly bright and

beautiful passage from a mediæval writer, Gilbert Porretanus or de la Porrée.¹ He was once left alone in his monastery while all his brethren had gone for change of air to the seaside, and he wrote in one of his letters:—

“Our house is empty, save only myself and the rats and mice, who nibble in solitary hunger. There is no voice in the hall, no tread on the stairs. The clock has stopped . . . the pump creaks no more. But I sit here with no company but books, dipping into dainty honeycombs of literature. All minds in the world’s history find their focus in a library. This is the pinnacle of the temple from which we may see all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. I keep Egypt and the Holy Land in the closet next the window. On one side of them is Athens and the Empire of Rome. Never was such an army mustered as I have here. No general ever had such soldiers as I have. No kingdom ever had half

¹ There were two writers of this name—one in the twelfth and one in the sixteenth century. I have not yet been able to verify the passage. It is quoted in Alexander Ireland’s “Booklovers’ Enchiridion.”

such illustrious subjects as mine, or half as well governed. I can put my haughtiest subjects up or down as it pleases me. . . . I call 'Plato,' and he answers 'Here'—a noble and sturdy soldier. 'Aristotle,' 'Here'—a host in himself. 'Demosthenes,' 'Cicero,' 'Cæsar,' 'Tacitus,' 'Pliny,' 'Here!' they answer, and they smile at me in their immortality of youth. Modest all, they never speak unless spoken to. Bountiful all, they never refuse to answer. And they are all at peace together. My architects are building night and day without sound of hammer; my painters designing, my poets singing, my philosophers discoursing, my historians and theologians weaving their tapestries, my generals marching about without noise or blood. I hold all Egypt in fee simple. I build not a city but empires at a word. I can say as much of all the Orient as he who was sent to grass did of Babylon. . . . All the world is around me; all that ever stirred human hearts or fired the imagination is harmlessly here. My library shelves are the avenues of time. Ages have wrought, generations grown, and all their blossoms are cast down here. It is the garden of immortal fruits, without dog or dragon."

II. All readers will, I think, thank me for that bright passage from an old scho-

lastic theologian nearly nine centuries ago. My next quotation shall be from Mr. Ruskin:—

“All the higher circles of human intelligence,” he says in “Sesame and Lilies,” “are, to those beneath, only momentarily and partially open. We may, by good fortune, obtain a glimpse of a great poet, and hear the sound of his voice, or put a question to a man of science and be answered good-humoredly. We may intrude ten minutes’ talk on a cabinet minister . . . or snatch, once or twice in our lives, the privilege of arresting the kind glance of a queen. And yet these momentary chances we covet . . . while, meantime, there is a society open to us of people who will talk to us as long as we like, whatever our rank or occupation. And this society, because it is so numerous and so gentle . . . kings and statesmen lingering patiently in the plainly furnished and narrow anterooms, our bookcase shelves—we make no account of that company—perhaps never listen to a word they would say, all day long!”

III. And here is one more eloquent passage from *Æneas* Sage:—

"I go into my library, and, like some great panorama, all history unrolls itself before me. I breathe the morning air of the world while the scent of Eden's roses yet lingers in it. . . . I see the Pyramids building. I hear Memnon murmur as the first morning sunbeam touches him. . . . I sit as in a theatre: the stage is Time, the play is the play of the World. What a spectacle it is! what kingly pomp! what processions pass by! what cities burn to heaven! what crowds of captives are dragged at the heels of conquerors! In my solitude I am only myself at intervals. The silence of the unpeopled Syrian plains, the incomings and outgoings of the Patriarchs, Abraham and Ishmael, Isaac in the fields at eventide, Rebekah at the well, Jacob's guile, Esau's face reddened by desert suns, Joseph's splendid funeral procession,—all these things I can find within the boards of my Old Testament. . . . Books are the true Elysian Fields where the spirits of the dead converse, couched on flowers; and to these fields a mortal may venture unappalled. What king's court can boast such company? what school of philosophy such wisdom? . . . No man sees more company than I do. I travel with mightier cohorts around me than did Tamerlane and Zenghis Khan in their fiery marches. I am a sovereign in my library; but it is the dead, not the living, that attend my *levée*."

I shall go on to say a few words about great separate regions of literature, such as History, Poetry, and Biography; but here I will conclude by urging you, dear reader, to enter on this paradisiacal domain which lies ever open before your feet — these gardens rich with “the summer opulence of heaven.” You may breathe this pure and exhilarating spiritual atmosphere as you sit with those high souls whom God has illuminated with the flame of genius. Glorious leaders are waiting to welcome you, and gentle saints to sit as brethren by your side. Why need any man feel “cabin’d, cribb’d, confin’d” in pettiness when at the lifting of a latch he may enter into “unimaginable realms of faerie”? Why need we be overworried by the fussy and the foolish, the base and the contemptible, when in books, without travelling as far as Endor, we may summon to our bidding the mightiest spirits of the dead? Why need we be drowned in disappoint-

ment and listlessness, as with that tide on the coast of Lincolnshire, "always shallow, yet always just deep enough to drown," when, at the price of a few pence, we may, as it were, hear Heaven's Seraphim choir-ing round the sapphire throne? Can we not escape in a moment from those whom the poet calls

"Men-slugs and human serpentry ;"

and can we not be relieved from life's worst enemies — vexatious, fretful, and lawless passions, "spirits of wasted energy and wandering desire, of unappeased famine and unsatisfied hope" — by communion with these kingly and radiant souls? A man who lives in this high society will walk through the world with the open eyes of wonder and the receptive mind of intelligence. He will believe in God; he will believe in Man; he will believe in Conscience; he will believe in Duty; and while he believes in these no darkness without

can ever wholly quench that light within, which is a reflection of the light of God Himself in the human soul. The best books of man will throw more and more widely open before him the Books of God, which are best interpreted by that chosen literature of the Chosen People, which more than all the other literature of the world is able to make us wise unto salvation.

Although great books should occupy the main attention of every student, yet I would by no means exclude the reading of other books which may be useful and even necessary, though we may be unable to call them "great." Many a book which is not great may still tend to diminish human sorrow and enhance human blessedness. It may only be "a book of the hour," and yet may help us towards the understanding of the books which are "for all time." It may live, even though it dies, for it may have tended "to add sun-

light to daylight by making the happy happier." It may have passed into the thoughts of many men, and so may survive in the best of all ways, by adding its infinitesimal quota to the nobler life of the world. Books doomed to swift oblivion have, of course, been multiplied to an amazing extent since the discovery of printing, but they must not be regarded as one of the unfortunate results of that discovery. The evil of the over-multiplication of books is more than counterbalanced by the blessing conferred by the dissemination of pure thought and wholesome knowledge. Only the fewest books—a mere infinitesimal proportion of the numbers which daily appear—survive even for a year; but the world is enriched forever by —

“ Books written when the soul is at springtide,
When it is laden like a groaning sky
Before a thunderstorm. They are power, and
gladness,

And majesty, and beauty. They seize the reader
As tempests seize a ship, and bear him on
With a wild joy. Some books are drenched sands
On which a great soul's wealth lies all in heaps
Like a wrecked argosy's. What power in books !
They mingle gloom and splendour as I've oft
In thunderous sunsets seen the thunder-piles
Seamed with dull fire, and fiercest glory-rents.
They awe me to my knees as if I stood
In presence of a king. They give me tears."

Even when we recall the thirty thousand novels which have been written in the last eighty years, many of them — perhaps the majority — though doomed to oblivion from their birth, have at least afforded some passing and harmless amusement to a few. It is said that now novels are being published at the rate of five a day! In that fact young readers should see the need for careful discrimination. Why read an utterly poor and meaningless book when a lifetime is far too short to read even those which are really good? I would say the same of "religious" books. There

are many which are full of high and pure thought. Why, then, waste time over those which are empty of all good ; over books of the feeblest commonplace, or shoals of manuals of sickly, exotic, and namby-pamby devotions? Hood was right when he said, —

“ A man may cry ‘ Church, church,’ at every word,
With no more piety than other people ;
A daw’s not counted a religious bird
Because it keeps caw-cawing from the steeple.”

We can go to sleep without aid from the narcotic of ecclesiastical nullities ; and even if we had nothing but the Bible in our hands, we could well do without the books of hypocrites, Priests and Pharisees, when they teach for doctrine the commandments of men.

1. Great books are the outcome of every age in which men have risen above the life of the savage. Even faithful students must be conscious, with deep sadness, of

the time they have wasted on what was worthless and tenth-rate, when they might have been holding intercourse with the immortals. It would be impossible for me in this brief paper even to touch on the whole splendid world of Pagan literature; and yet how much does it enshrine of priceless worth! "God," as St. Peter so emphatically taught us, in language which was an echo of the teaching of the Saviour of mankind, "is no respecter of persons, but *in every nation* he that feareth Him, and doeth righteousness, is accepted of Him."

This was why St. Paul does not shrink from quoting Menander to the Corinthians; and a hexameter line of Epimenides to Titus; and a poem of his fellow-countryman Aratus to the Athenians, when he was trying to impress upon them the truth that "God hath made of one every nation of men . . . that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He is not far from each one

of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being." Even those who do not know Greek might with advantage read Homer in the translations of Chapman, Pope, or Cowper. Keats was no scholar, yet after reading Chapman's Homer he wrote the famous sonnet—

"Much have I travell'd in the lands of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne:
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I as some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific — and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent upon a peak in Darien."

Again, Emerson has taught us all he learnt from an English translation of Plato; and without knowing Greek we might learn much from Plumptre's Sopho-

cles; and versions of the holy thoughts of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius, those "bright consummate flowers" of heathen morality: — and with no knowledge of Latin a youth may yet gain delight from Dryden's or Sotheby's Virgil, or Murphy's Tacitus.

2. But I must pass on to the great realms of Christian literature.

By Christian literature we mean that vast, and indeed immeasurable, multitude of books which owes its direct origin and inspiration to the advent of Christ. They belong to many different ages and many varying epochs of human thought; but to come under the head of distinctively Christian literature they must have emanated from those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and who own allegiance to "Him first, Him last, Him midst, and without end."

I. The first great epoch of Christian literature for six centuries is that of "The

Fathers." Now, I do not, of course, recommend the study of the Fathers, as a whole, to ordinary readers; yet almost any one might procure translations of a few writings which would throw light on a most memorable epoch, and not be without their influence on daily life. Even the earliest and least gifted of them teach us the memorable lesson of the supremacy of godliness. So far as genius and learning are concerned, there is no comparison between such humble and ungifted men as the earliest Christian Fathers—such men, for instance, as Clement of Rome, Ignatius, or Polycarp—and the great classic writers of Greece and Rome.

The early Christians could boast of no historian who distantly approached the genius of Tacitus; of no philosophers so eloquent as Seneca, Epictetus, or Marcus Aurelius; of no satirists like Juvenal and Persius; of no men of letters like the elder or younger Pliny; of no poet who could for

a moment be compared even with Martial, or Statius, or Claudian. Yet the miracle of the Christian victory was won when Christianity was simplest, was weakest, was most despised; when Christians were hunted into the darkness of the catacombs, and were mangled by wild beasts in the Colosseum; and when, nevertheless, "by the irresistible might of weakness they shook the world." From Christ alone came the new mysterious force which gave to Christian literature, even in its crude and poverty-stricken infancy, its rapturous confidence "that, at last, the routine of vice had met its match," and that the attainment of the loftiest ideal of manhood was open even to the humblest slave.

The secrets of the glorious history of Christianity lay in the fact that the life "in Christ"—to quote the special motto of St. Paul—was a life of innocence and of hope. Amid a paganism desecrated by putrid stains, the proudest heathen might

well quail before the simple challenge of Tertullian, "*Nos soli innocentes sumus.*" And the hope of Christians, as it was a result of innocence, was also concomitant with peace and joy. There is one book which every one might read with interest and advantage. It is the "Shepherd of Hermas" — the "Pilgrim's Progress" of the second century. It was a book so beloved in early days that it was even read in churches as though it were a book of Holy Scripture. Intellectually it reaches no high level; but where in all the rich, but too often unhallowed, works of Pagans would you find such a sentence as this?

"The Angel of Repentance is delicate, and modest, and meek, and quiet. Take from thyself grief, for it is the smoke of doubt and of ill-temper. *Put on gladness, which hath always favor before God. For every one that is glad doeth the things that are good, and thinketh good thoughts, despising grief.*" This ebullient gladness, this

joy in the Holy Ghost in the midst of much tribulation, this mixture of ἀγαλλίασις and ἀφελότης as St. Luke calls them, of “buoyant exultation” and “single-hearted simplicity,” were the essential characteristics — alas! in these days the too much darkened characteristics — of early Christian life. In those old primitive Fathers we might rediscover this unique and original birthright of Christianity, this secret which of all others should be most jealously guarded by the torchbearers of Christian literature; and therewith we might recognize the truth that —

“We may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life *whose fountains are within.*”

We are told of the old Egyptian king Ozymandias, a thousand years before Christ, that he called his library “the treasure-house of the remedies of the soul.” No better description could be given of holy and noble books. They wield “the

expulsive power of pure affections." In sadness they may make us less sad, in solitude less lonely, in bereavement less utterly bereaved.

II. What is called "Patristic Literature" continues for about five centuries. If any of my readers desire to form even a slight acquaintance with its manifold wealth, I would recommend them to read some of the works of Gregory of Nazianzus and of St. Chrysostom among the Greek Fathers; of Tertullian, St. Jerome, and St. Augustine among the Latin Fathers. St. Augustine especially was a man of genius, sensibility, and eloquence; and there are two of his works which may be said to belong to general literature, and have a never-dying interest. One is the famous "Confessions," the other the epoch-making "City of God." The first — a book of a class which has been exceedingly rare — is from first to last a commentary on Augustine's own memorable words, "Thou,

O God, has made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee." The other is the first attempt to write a philosophy of history. It suggested to the Spanish writer Orosius the groundwork of his celebrated "Epitome;" and its meaning is summed up in the sentence with which Orosius begins his work, "*Divina providentia agitur mundus et homo.*" It is God who sways all the destinies of the universe and of human life.

III. The "Patristic" epoch was succeeded by the "Scholastic." The long period of the Dark Ages and the Middle Ages produced, of course, its historians, — such as our own Gildas and Bede, — and a few other general writers; but the *main* literature — and even that is comparatively scanty — consists of the theological works of the "Schoolmen," as they are called, both theologians and mystics. These rest, for the most part untouched by any but a few scholars, upon very dusty

shelves. But the *Summa Theologiæ* by St. Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor; and the Life of Christ by St. Bonaventura, the Seraphic Doctor; and the impassioned sermons of St. Bernard, the Mellifluous Doctor, — will always find eager readers. The most universally popular book of the Middle Ages is “The Imitation of Christ,” usually attributed to St. Thomas à Kempis, but in which Jean Gerson, “the most Christian Doctor,” probably had a share. With all its defects — mediæval and monastic as it is, expressive mainly of a cloistral Christianity, and in some directions glaringly inadequate — it has yet, as a whole, most powerfully and beneficently swayed the religious imagination of many generations of men, and its “brief, quivering sentences” will find a place in every earnest heart.

IV. The thirteenth century witnessed the dawn of vernacular religious poetry in “The Song of the Creatures,” by sweet

St. Francis of Assisi; but about the year 1300 Dante began to write his "Divine Comedy," which has been called "the voice of ten silent centuries." Of that immortal poem — one of the deepest utterances which ever came from the human heart — I will not speak now, because in future papers I hope to win many of my readers to its earnest study.

v. The fifteenth century witnessed events of overwhelming significance, both for Christian literature and for the general progress of mankind. Such events were the discovery of America in 1492; the invention of printing in 1449; and that awakening of the human mind known as "The Renaissance," which received a powerful impulse from the flight of Greeks into Italy, who brought with them a revived knowledge of Greek literature, after the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453.

In my former church of St. Margaret's, Westminster, is a stained glass window,

presented to me by the printers of London in memory of William Caxton, the first English printer, who was one of the auditors of that church. On one side of the window you see the founder of English literature, the old monk of Jarrow, the venerable Bede, dictating to his boy scribe, just before his death, the last verse of his translation of St. John. On the other side stands Erasmus, the morning-star of the Reformation, whose troubled life was the outcome of the eager age when "Greece rose from the dead with the New Testament in her hand." Between the two stands William Caxton beside his simple printing-press. Caxton's motto was "*Fiat Lux*—Let there be light;" and underneath the window are the four lines written at my request by the late Lord Tennyson :—

"His cry was 'Light, more light, while time shall last;'
He saw the glories growing on the night,
But not the shadows which that light should cast,
Till shadows vanish in the Light of Light."

Who shall attempt to estimate the immeasurable results of the Art of Printing? It has shaken the thrones of tyranny, and quenched the bale-fires of the Inquisition. By disseminating the thoughts of those in whose souls God has illuminated the light of genius, it may enable the humblest among us to

“Unfold

The wings within him wrapped and proudly rise,
Redeemed from earth, a creature of the skies.”

And — because the cause of truth, with such a power as that of the Printing-Press to help it, is irresistible — the Renaissance was followed by “the bright and blissful Reformation,” which, as Milton said, “struck through the black and settled night of ignorance and Anti-Christian tyranny,” and in which “the sweet odor of the returning Gospel embathed men’s souls in the fragrancy of heaven.”

VI. After the invention of printing, the range of literature widened, and from a

narrow river it became a boundless sea. Think of all the wealth of the Elizabethan age, when a galaxy of glorious men gathered round the throne of the maiden queen, and when England could boast of such writers as Sydney, Raleigh, Hooker, Spenser, Ben Jonson, Marlowe, and above all, of the poet who, of all men who ever lived, was endowed with the most oceanic and myriad-minded genius, William Shakespeare. Think of the period of the Commonwealth, with such sons as John Milton and John Bunyan and John Dryden. Think of the age of Queen Anne, with such writers as Pope and Addison. And has any century in England been more prolific of splendid names than our own? We have had such poets as Burns, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Scott, Southey, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Tennyson, Browning, and many more of brilliant fame; such novelists as Sir Walter Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot; such histo-

rians as Macaulay, Freeman, Froude; such men of science as Wheatstone, Faraday, Darwin, Tyndall, and Huxley; such men of letters as Carlyle and Ruskin; such theologians and religious teachers as Newman, Stanley, F. W. Robertson, and Lightfoot (to mention the dead only), and multitudes of other writers of eminence whose names alone would fill the page.

So vast is the realm open to every young reader even in Christian and English literature. If he choose Poetry as his field, two at the least of the supreme poets of the world, Shakespeare and Milton, were Englishmen. And what reading would be more likely to purify and ennoble than that of the poets who teach us, most sweetly, and with clearest insight, "the great in conduct, and the pure in thought"? Do not those rare souls "enrich the blood of the world," and present us with the very bloom and fragrance of all human knowledge, human thought,

human passion? Wordsworth accepted it as his mission "to open the eyes and widen the thoughts of his countrymen, and teach them to discern in the humblest and most unsuspected forms the presence of what was kindred to all that they had long recognized as the highest and greatest." We gratefully echo the prayer, —

"Blessings be with them, and eternal praise,
Who gave us nobler loves and nobler cares;
The Poets who on earth have made us heirs
Of truth and pure delight by heavenly lays!"

Or if a youth choose History as his field, is not history "the crystallized experience of humanity," — "a civil theology of the divine providence"? Is it not as Bolingbroke said, "Philosophy teaching by examples"? Surely History is as Carlyle called it, "a divine book of Revelation, of which the inspired texts are great men;" and as Fichte said, "a constant inflowing of God into human affairs."

Is it a small thing to have presented to us as in a splendid drama the reasons why Empires rise and fall;

“The solid rules of civil government —
What makes a nation happy; keeps it so;
What ruins kingdoms and lays cities flat”?

Or if a student choose Biography for his favorite branch of study, Biography will show him every type of man, the innocent and the guilty, the strenuous and the idle, the happy and the wretched; as well as (for his warning) the multitude who are neither one thing nor the other, the half-and-half souls, the neutral Laodiceans. Thus we may make the dead live again, to show us how to guide our own lives by avoiding their errors, and imitating their good examples. Who shall say how much we may thus gain?

What inexhaustible treasures are here! Yet if the youth would really enjoy them, “he must not only listen, but *read*; he

must not only read, but *think*. Knowledge without common sense is folly; without method it is waste; without wisdom it is fanaticism; without religion it is death." The reading of all other books will fail in its best object if it does not enable him to read and understand the Book of books, of which it has been truly said that "its light is like the body of heaven in its clearness; its vastness like the bosom of the sea; its variety like scenes of nature."

CHAPTER II.

JOHN BUNYAN.

IN the previous pages I have tried to show you how the works of God's most gifted sons, —

“Our loftier brothers, but one in blood,”

may brighten our lives, enlarge our intellects, widen our sympathies, uplift us above the greed, the narrowness, the querulous discontent, the vulgar selfishness, which are the curse and bane of so many lives.

I will now speak of a great Puritan writer, from whose simple vividness and keen insight into human nature we may all learn lessons of lifelong value.

He enforced for us the great truths of



JOHN BUNYAN.

1

2

3

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righteousness which he had himself learned in the books of experience and of Scripture, which are the eternal books of the Living God.

John Bunyan was born at Elstow, in Bedfordshire, in 1628,¹ the year in which the House of Commons forced Charles I. to consent to the Petition of Rights. Milton was a son of the middle classes; the father of Shakespeare was a respectable tradesman; but Bunyan was the son of a tinker, in days when tinkers were mostly regarded as gypsies and vagabonds. "I was," he says, "of a low and inconsiderable generation, my father's house being of that rank that is meanest and most despised of all families in the land." It was this

¹ Dates in Bunyan's life: birth, 1628; battle of Edgehill, 1642; battle of Naseby, 1645; execution of Charles I., 1649; Bunyan's marriage, 1669; baptized in the Ouse, 1643; begins to preach, 1657; sent to Bedford Gaol, 1660; released, but again imprisoned, 1666; "Grace Abounding," 1666; liberated, 1672; "Pilgrim's Progress," 1678; "Holy War," 1672; dies, Aug. 31, 1688.

working tinker in whom God kindled that light of holy genius to which we owe "The Pilgrim's Progress from Earth to Heaven."

"Not to the rich He came, nor to the ruling,
Men full of meat, whom wholly He abhors ;
Not to the fools grown insolent in fooling,
Most when the lost are dying at the doors.
This is His will ; He takes and He refuses,
Finds Him ambassadors whom men deny ;
Wise ones, nor mighty, for his saints He chooses : —
No ! such as John, or Gideon, or I."

Bunyan's childhood fell in a time of wild religious and political ferment, and in an age when men's beliefs were more concrete, less shadowy, more intensely real, than now. Born with a vivid imagination, he was, even in his childhood, so conscious of his boyish faults that he was scared and affrighted with fearful dreams and visions of devils. He fell into the sins of swearing and lying, and looked with terrified misgiving and remorse on

amusements which in themselves were perfectly innocent. He had no books except the romance of Sir Bevis of Southampton, and the Bible, of which he understood every word in the most literal sense.

Thousands of youths in England and America at this moment are leading lives ten times more vicious and godless and self-indulgent than that of this tinker's boy, without feeling one twinge of his terrible remorse. So sensitive was his conscience that at a single rebuke he gave up the habit of swearing, into which, from early years, he had unconsciously fallen.

"As I was standing at a neighbor's shop-window, and there cursing and swearing after my wonted manner, there sat within the woman of the house, who heard me; and though she was a very loose and ungodly wretch, yet protested that I swore and cursed at that most fearful rate that she was made to tremble to hear me. At this reproof I was silenced and put to secret shame before the God of

Heaven; wherefore, while I stood there, hanging down my head, I wished that I might be a little child again, that my father might learn me to speak without this wicked way of swearing."

He was twice saved from drowning, and once from the bite of an adder; and it is said that once, when he had enlisted in the Puritan army, a sentinel who had asked to take his place was shot through the heart. This deepened his conviction of a Divine Providence over him, and made his conscience still more acutely sensitive, though he was entirely free from all the more flagrant and debasing forms of vice. At nineteen he married an orphan girl, and worked steadily and skilfully as a tinker. His wife was a good Christian; and he derived benefit from the two books—"The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven" and "The Practice of Piety"—which were her only dower. But Bunyan was living in an age when men had seen the hollowness of a functional religion, and

had realized that their souls had to do with the living and eternal God, who will tolerate no shams. He became convinced of the necessity for a new birth, and conscious that he had not attained to it. So terribly was he in earnest that he was even morbidly conscientious.

“I durst not take a pin, or a stick, though but so big as a straw, for my conscience now was sore, and would smart at every touch. I could not now tell how to speak my words, for fear I should misplace them. Oh, how gingerly did I then go in all I did or said! I found myself as on a miry bog that shook if I did but stir; and was as those left both of God and Christ, the spirit, and all good things.”

This unhealthy self-introspection drove him to the very verge of madness. He became sorry that God had made him a man. He blessed the condition of the birds, beasts, and fishes; he envied even the dog or the toad, for they had not a sinful nature; they were not obnoxious to the

wrath of God. He felt himself haunted by devils. An old copy of "Luther's Commentary on the Galatians" brought him comfort for a time; but then, as a bird shot from a tree, he fell into despair, until voices from heaven seemed to comfort him, and at last the clouds and thick darkness which had so long enshrouded him broke, and were scattered, and thenceforth he enjoyed in his inmost soul the sunlight of God's peace. After this he became so happy that he felt inclined to go out and tell even the crows on the ploughed fields of his great joy.

We need not further follow the story of his life. While still a young man he was called to the ministry among the Baptists in 1657, and at the Restoration was imprisoned in Bedford jail, because he would not promise not to preach among his fellow-believers. For twelve years he continued in prison, for conscience' sake, supporting himself and his wife and children

by making tags for bootlaces. The parting from his loved ones, he says, "was often as the pulling of his flesh from his bones." He thought that he was leaving them to wants, hardships, and miseries,

"especially my poor blind child, who lay nearer my heart than all I had besides. 'Poor child,' thought I, 'what sorrow art thou like to have for thy portion in this world! Thou must be beaten, suffer hunger, cold, nakedness, and a thousand calamities, though I cannot now endure the winds to blow on thee. But yet,' thought I, 'I must venture all with God, though it goes to the quick to leave thee.'"

Thus, as sincerity had triumphed in his conversion, so conscience triumphed over the severest temptations, in making him ready to give up everything rather than duty.

How ample God repays, how infinitely He rewards, those who sacrifice everything for Him! If they have persecutions, they have also the hundredfold recompense here on earth, and, in the world to come, life

everlasting. It is to Bunyan's imprisonment that he owes his immortality, and what was infinitely dearer to him, the beatitude of conferring untold benefits upon the children of God.

For it was in prison that he wrote his "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners," which is his spiritual autobiography; and also the immortal "Pilgrim's Progress from Earth to Heaven." When I was young it was rare to find a child, that could read at all, who had not read "The Pilgrim's Progress;" but in these days I find many who know little or nothing of this immortal book. Should this be the case with any who read this paper, I trust that they will at once repair the loss, and learn some of the most sacred and serious of all human lessons clothed in a story full of charm, which they may each purchase for themselves for a few pence, and which they will value, thereafter, as a lifelong possession. The story opens:—

"As I walked through the wilderness of the world, I lighted on a certain place where there was a den [Bedford jail], and I laid me down in that place to sleep; and as I slept I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and behold a man, clothed in rags, standing with his face from his own home, with a book in his hand, and a great burden on his back."

The man is Christian, or, in other words, Bunyan himself; the book is the Bible; the burden is the load of his sins. The history of his wanderings, perils, and compensations is more or less the history of every human soul which is not content with the base devotion to worthless things. The adventures of Christian, after his soul had once been awakened, are those which may befall each one of us on our journey from earth to that which comes hereafter. But with what beautiful, simple touches are these experiences described by Bunyan in such passages as these:—

Christian reads his roll, and looking upon Evangelist very carefully, said, "Whither

must I fly?" Then said Evangelist, pointing with his finger over a very wide field, "Do you see yonder wicket-gate?" The man said, "No." Then said the other, "Do you see yonder shining light?" He said, "I think I do." Then said Evangelist, "Keep that light in your eye, and go up directly thereto; so shalt thou see the gate, at which, when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do." So I saw in my dream that the man began to run, he looked not behind him, but fled toward the middle of the plain. Now over the gate there was written, "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you." He knocked therefore more than once or twice. At last there came a grave person to the gate, named Good Will, who asked who was there? and whence he came? and what he would have? "Here is a poor burdened sinner," said Christian. "I come from the City of Destruction, but am going to the Mount Zion. I would know, sir, if you are willing to let

me in?" — "I am willing with all my heart," said he; and with that he opened the gate. Then Christian is shown the warning scenes in the House of the Interpreter; and comes to the cross, at the foot of which his burden is loosed from off his back. After this, the Shining Ones meet him with the words, "Peace be with thee."

Then we are introduced to the various persons whom he encounters upon his pilgrimage, — Sloth, and Formalist, and Hypocrite, and Mistrust, and Talkative, but also Faithful and Hopeful. He falls asleep on the Hill Difficulty, and loses his roll; he comes to the House Beautiful, where dwell Prudence, Piety, and Charity, and where he rests in the large upper chamber, whose window opened toward the sunrising; and the name of the chamber was Peace. There he is clad in the armor of God; and meets the fiend Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation. When he is on the point of being crushed, seizing his

sword, he gives Apollyon a deadly wound, so that he spreads forth his dragon wings and speeds him away, that Christian for a season sees him no more. The fiends whisper evil thoughts in his ears in the Valley of the Shadow of Death; but he passes through it safely and meets Faithful, who is martyred in Vanity Fair. Then, after rest in the Meadow of Lilies, he tries a by-path, and is seized by Giant Despair, and nearly killed in Doubting Castle; but he is welcomed by the shepherds on the Delectable Mountains, and so at last reaches the land of Beulah. In that land, whose air was very sweet and pleasant, they hear continually the singing of birds, and see every day the flowers, and hear the voice of doves, and are in sight of the gates of pearl, while there the Shining Ones commonly walk, because it is upon the borders of Heaven. And so, at last, they pass the Dark River, and all the trumpets sound for them on the other side.

Scarcely less beautiful and edifying is the second part, — the pilgrimage of Christiana and her boys, — with which I have no space to deal.

Let me point out one or two characteristics of Bunyan's beautiful and helpful books.

1. Notice, first, the many pointed sentences in which they abound, such as these: —

“Prayer will make a man cease from sin, or sin will entice a man to cease from prayer.”

“One leak will sink a ship, and one sin will destroy a sinner.”

“‘When your garments are white,’ says Jesus, ‘the world will count you mine.’”

“Nothing can harm me but sin; nothing can grieve me but sin; nothing can make me base before my foes but sin.”

“Is it little in thine eyes that our King doth offer thee mercy?”

“The bitter goes before the sweet. Yea, and forasmuch as it doth, it makes the sweet the sweeter.”

2. Notice, next, the great beauty of many special passages: —

(a) Here is one. After telling how Apollyon straddled over the whole breadth of the way in front of Christian, and pressed on him, throwing darts as thick as hail, and wounded him in his head, his hand, and his foot, he adds: —

“In this combat, no man can imagine, unless he had seen and heard, as I did, what yelling and hideous roaring Apollyon made all the time of the fight. He spake like a dragon; and, on the other side, what sighs and groans burst forth from Christian’s heart. I never saw him all the while give so much as one pleasant look, till he perceived he had wounded Apollyon with his two-edged sword; then, indeed, he did smile and look upward; but ’twas the dreadfulest sight that ever I saw.”

(b) Or take this scene. Interpreter leads Christiana and her boys

“into a room where was a man who could look no way but downward, with a muck-rake in his hand. There stood also one over his head, with a celestial crown in his hand, and proffered him that crown for his muck-rake; but the man did neither look

up nor regard, but raked to himself the straws, the small sticks, and dust of the floor."

It is an image of a man of this world, devoted exclusively to earthly things.

"Then said Christiana, 'Oh, deliver me from this muck-rake!'—'That prayer,' said the Interpreter, 'has lain by till it is almost rusty; "Give me not riches" is scarce the prayer of one of ten thousand. Straws and sticks and dust, with most, are the great things now looked after.'"

(c) Take one more lovely passage:—

"Now as they were going along and talking, they espied a boy feeding his father's sheep. The boy was in very mean clothes, but of a fresh and well-favored countenance; and as he sat by himself he sang. 'Hark!' said Mr. Greatheart, 'to what the shepherd-boy saith.' So they hearkened, and he said:—

'He that is down needs fear no fall,
He that is low no pride;
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide.

I am content with what I have,
Little be it or much ;
And, Lord ! contentment still I crave,
Because thou savest such.'

.

Then said the guide, 'Do you hear him? I will dare to say this boy lives a merrier life, and wears more of that herb called heart's-ease in his bosom, than he that is clad in silk and velvet.'"

3. Notice, thirdly, the wonderful vividness and reality of Bunyan's impersonations. "They are not," it has been said, "shadowy abstractions, but men and women of our own every-day world." We are not unacquainted with Mr. By-ends of the town of Fair Speech, who always has the luck to jump in his judgment with the way of the times, and to get thereby, and who always walks with Religion when he goes in his silver slippers. His kindred and surroundings are only too familiar to us; his uncle, Mr. Twotongues, the parson; his wife, that very virtuous woman, my

Lady Feigning's daughter, and his grandfather, "who was a waterman, looking one way and rowing another." Mr. Facing-both-ways, Mr. Anything, and the rest are familiar people. Nor is his schoolmaster, one Mr. Gripeman, of the market-town of Love-gain, in the county of Coveting, a stranger to us. Obstinate with his dogged determination, and Pliable with his shallow impressionableness, are among our acquaintances. We have before now come across "the brisk lad, Ignorance, from the town of Conceit;" and "the man, Temporary, who lived in a house two miles off from Honesty, next door to one Turn-back." Short-round and Sleepy-head and Linger-after-lust and Sir Having Greedy, we know them all. Where is the town which does not contain Mrs. Timorous, and her coterie of gossips, Mrs. Bat's-eyes, Mrs. Light-mind, and Mrs. Know-nothing, all as merry as the maids; and Madam Bubble, speaking very smoothly,

with a smile at the end of each sentence? Nor are we entirely unacquainted with "the young woman whose name was Dull." "The mind of Bunyan," says Lord Macaulay, "was so imaginative that personifications, when he dealt with them, became men."

How marvellously picturesque again is the description of the city of Vanity Fair, with its fools, knaves, and rogues, their hatred of true Christians, and their railing accusations; and as for the evidence sworn against good men by Envy, Superstition, and Pickthank, before the brutal judge, Lord Hate-good, why, we hear it every day.

"Then went the Jury out, and first among themselves, Mr. Blindman, the foreman, said, 'I see clearly that the man is a heretic.' Then said Mr. No-good, 'Away with such a fellow from the earth.' 'Ay,' said Mr. Malice, 'for I hate the very looks of him.' Then said Mr. Love-lust, 'I could never endure him.' 'Nor I,' said Mr. Live-loose, 'for he would always be condemning my way.' 'Hang him! hang him!' said Mr. Heady. 'A sorry scrub!'

said Mr. High-mind. 'My heart riseth against him,' said Mr. Enmity. 'He is a rogue,' said Mr. Liar. 'Hanging is too good for him,' said Mr. Cruelty. 'Let us despatch him out of the way,' said Mr. Hate-light. Then said Mr. Implacable, 'Might I have all the world given me, I could not be reconciled to him, therefore let us forthwith bring him in guilty of death.' And so they did."

They scourged Faithful, they buffeted him, they lanced his flesh with knives, they stoned him with stones; last of all, they burned him to ashes at the stake. Thus came Faithful to his end.

I have no space to speak of Bunyan's other works. His "Grace Abounding" is the spiritual autobiography of his early years, before he found peace and happiness in the conviction of assured forgiveness and of the love of God. His "History of Mr. Badman" is hardly an allegory. It is a page torn out of the volume of Bunyan's daily experience. Mr. Badman is simply an ordinary, vulgar, typical Eng-

lish scoundrel. Even as a child he lies and pilfers and swears. Apprenticed to a good man, he robs him and runs away. Apprenticed to a wicked man, he neglects his work, robs the till, and exercises an evil influence on the family. He is started in business. Being tall and fair, he marries a lady with money, runs into debt, spends her dower, cheats, lies, and, by base shrewdness, prospers. His wife dies of a broken heart. But no man can escape the consequences of his misdeeds. In a drunken fit Mr. Badman breaks his legs and becomes seriously ill; while half intoxicated he is tricked into a second marriage with a low woman who squanders his ill-got "hatfuls of money," and he dies worthless and impenitent, suffering no Nemesis but that of his own brutal and selfish habits; "travelling along the primrose path to the everlasting bonfire, with such pleasures as a brute may find in them;" and yet leaving us with the conviction that, if there were

no bonfire, we should still prefer to be with Christian, even among his severest hardships.

Bunyan's "Holy War," the story of how the armies of the great king recovered the lost town of Mansoul, and how it was again partially recaptured, is another fine allegory, well worth the reading. In his later years, Bunyan acquired great fame as a preacher; nor can we wonder at this, for he himself says: "What I preached I did myself feel, yea, I did smartingly feel."

When Charles II. expressed his surprise to Dr. Owen that a man of his learning "could sit and hear an illiterate tinker prate," "May it please your Majesty," answered Dr. Owen, "could I possess that tinker's ability for preaching, I would most gladly relinquish all my learning."

Amid these works, at the age of sixty, death came upon him, and in a way which all might envy; for it was in consequence of a deed of mercy. A youth, a neighbor

of Bunyan's, happening to fall into the displeasure of his father, and being much troubled in mind upon that account, as also for that his father proposed to disinherit him, asked Bunyan to act as his intercessor. Bunyan, always ready for any good office, undertook the task, and used such pressing arguments against anger and passion, as also for love and reconciliation, that the heart of the father yearned toward his returning son. After this good deed he had to ride from Reading to London, forty miles, through the drenching rain. Wet to the skin, and very tired, he was seized with a fever, and "with a constant and Christian patience, with holy words of peace and hope, resigned his soul into the hands of his most merciful Redeemer."

It was a life good and true; and the books which were its outcome were written by Bunyan as with his heart's blood. If any reader will honestly and carefully study them, they may do him more good

than many sermons. When we are struggling along through the Slough of Despond, or running towards the Wicket Gate, or shut up in Doubting Castle, or fighting Apollyon in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, or engaged in our business in Vanity Fair, we may learn many a lesson of wisdom and courage from the poor imprisoned tinker of Bedford who died more than two hundred years ago.

CHAPTER III.

SHAKESPEARE.

NOTHING but our habitual narrowness and conventionalism prevents us from realizing that the words of great souls are intended by God for our delight indeed, but far more for our moral illumination, and for our spiritual guidance.

One of the marvels of life is that God has dowered every child of man with such priceless boons, and that the vast majority of us, His children,—for whose joy and instruction He meant these blessings,—remain not only to a great extent *indifferent* to them, but stupidly *unconscious* of them. Take, by way of illustration, the beauty and glory of the outer world. May we not often say with Emerson:—



SHAKSPEARE.
(The Stratford Portrait.)



"In this refulgent summer it has been a luxury to draw the breath of life. The grass grows, the buds burst, the meadow is spotted with fire and gold in the tint of flowers. The air is full of birds, and sweet with the breath of the pine, the balm of Gilead, and the new hay. Night brings no gloom with its welcome shade. Through the transparent darkness the stars pour their almost spiritual rays."

And again: —

How does nature deify us with a few cheap elements! Give me health and a day, and I will make the pomp of emperors ridiculous."

It ought to be a part of our most ordinary belief that

"Every bird that sings,
And every flower that stars the elastic sod,
And every breath the radiant summer brings
To the pure spirit, is a word of God."

Yet how few are there who habitually use to the uttermost these gracious gifts! We are ever grumbling about our poverty. How many of us realize the immeasurable abundance of true riches which God has

poured upon us? To how many of us has the "glad light green of the spring leaves," the sweet season of bud and bloom, the snowdrops and violets and daffodils, the opening rosebud and the song of the blackbird, the pomp and prodigality of heaven, the crimson pageantries of sunset, the sea's "unnumbered laughter," the moon gliding in her brightness amid night's innumerable stars — to how many of us have these been a source of pure and passionate happiness, a cause of rapturous thanksgiving to Him who gave them?

How many of us have been weaned by them from love of money and selfishness and petty malice? Yet to whom were these glories given if not to us? "God hath made everything beautiful in its time," said the Wise King three thousand years ago; "also he hath set the world in their hearts, so that man cannot find out the work that God hath done from the beginning even to the end." "The firma-

ment in its clearness, the beauty of heaven, the glory of the stars, the rainbow exceedingly beautiful in the brightness thereof," — all these things praise the Lord. But man is dumb. Fire and hail, snow and vapor, wind and storm, fulfil his word; but man — "colder than the ice, more aimless than the vapor, more inconstant than the wind" — lives in fretful ingratitude and disobedient pride.

Is it not just the same with our ignorant neglect of that gift of GENIUS which God has kindled for us in the hearts of the world's greatest writers? They are ours, but multitudes do not care to study them, or even so much as to read them. They shine, but how rarely do we try to "climb by these sunbeams to the Father of Lights"!

"Ever their statures rise before us,
Our loftier brothers, but one in blood;
At bed and table they lord it o'er us
With looks of beauty and words of good;"

and we turn from them to the mire and draff of personalities and idle talk, or waste our leisure in groping amid the verminiferous dust of malignant gossip. "Give me a great truth, that I may live on it!" exclaimed the German poet Herder.

These Heaven-enkindled souls offer us great truths in abundance; but of how small avail is it to those on whom has fallen the serpent's curse: "Upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life." From these high thoughts we turn to ignoble ends and ignoble amusements, and live and move and have our being in the infinite littleness of chance desires. Alas!

"Unless above himself he can
Erect himself, how mean a thing is man!"

In this and the following chapters I wish to say a few words about an immeasurable subject. I will try to indicate some fraction as to what we may learn of life,

as God has made it, from one of the most gifted souls which He ever created, William Shakespeare. I have already tried to exorcise from timid minds the silly notion that in so doing I shall be taking any reader away from those great eternal lessons which we associate with our too narrow and technical conception of "religion."

Many persons still seem to be as foolish as the Khalif Omar, who is said to have ordered the invaluable library of Alexandria to be burned because the books must either be in agreement with the Koran or in contradiction to it, and in the first case they were needless, and in the second reprehensible! If the sovereign truths of the Gospel seem for a moment to be absent from what we say of literature, — as they are, for instance, from large sections of the Bible itself, — yet in all true and lofty teaching they are still as essentially present as the bottom of the ocean is present, though we see it not as we glide over

its placid surface or toss upon its stormy waves.

In the plays of Shakespeare, however, those eternal verities of God's revelation are scarcely ever out of sight. Shakespeare's mind was *saturated* with the Bible. "He was habitually conversant with Scripture," writes one commentator. "He had deeply imbibed the Scriptures," says another. His works have been called "A secular Bible ;" but they are something more than secular. The good Archbishop Sharp, a friend of saints in the reign of Queen Anne, once a Dean of Canterbury, used to say : "The Bible and Shakespeare have made me Archbishop of York."

"Next to the Bible," said Dr. Hugh McNeile, Dean of Ripon, "I have derived more benefit from Shakespeare than any human author ; for he so thoroughly knew the human heart." Dean Milman classes him among the great Christian poets, as not merely writing on religious subjects, but as

instinct with the religious life of Christianity. "He favored virtue from his very soul," said Keble, "and led the way to sounder views even upon sacred things, and to juster sentiments concerning God Himself."

A learned and saintly English bishop has written a book entitled "Shakespeare and the Bible." In it he shows that as the Bible was one of the few books to which Shakespeare had constant access, so in hundreds of passages he illustrates with unparalleled power its deepest lessons. Many truths lie in the Bible, buried under mountain-loads of perverted religionism. It needs the grandeur and truthfulness of an intellect which Heaven bestowed, to bring back not a few of the deepest truths of Scripture in their brightness and original intensity. If we never emancipate ourselves from the current misuse of the Bible, we may, like the villanous Richard III., trick out our base ends "with odd old ends stolen forth of Holy Writ," or incur

the censure which Antonio passed on Shylock:—

! "The Devil can cite Scripture for his purpose;
An evil soul producing holy witness
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,
A goodly apple rotten at the heart."

In separating the upheaped chaff of fetish-worship and Pharisaism from the wheat of true religion, Shakespeare will help us in many ways; and we can purchase his plays for a penny apiece.

There are three benefits especially which souls who prefer fact to falsity may gain from the study of Shakespeare. One is the thrilling expression of the wisest and holiest lessons in many an isolated passage; the second is the intense significance of separate scenes; the third is the deeper and more solemn insight into the meaning of life set forth in entire plays. On subjects so large I can, of course, touch but cursorily by way of specimen.

My object is only to illustrate, not to exhaust; to offer, by way of specimen, one or two grains of gold, and to point to the mine where we may dig for them ourselves. The truths which Shakespeare illuminates with the glory of his genius have a universal bearing, and cannot be used for sectarian ends.

First, then, let us notice — quite casually — Shakespeare's immortal presentation of isolated moral and spiritual truths. Books have recently been published to prove that Shakespeare was a Roman Catholic. The attempt is futile. On the contrary, it was the Protestant type of character, and the Protestant policy in state and nation, which received impulse and vigor from the mind of the greatest of English poets. "Energy, devotion to the real, self-government, tolerance, a disbelief in machinery and materialism for the improvement of human character, an entire indifference to outward functions in comparison with the invisible

life;" and, it may be added, an absolute fidelity to human facts, and a freedom too sacred to bow itself to self-interested manipulations of truth, or the dominancy of any usurping priestcraft, — are his essential characteristics.

Here are a few of the isolated truths which Shakespeare has clothed in immortal words. Are any of us slandered or misunderstood? May we not take this comfort: —

"If powers divine
Behold our human actions, as they do,
I doubt not then but innocence shall make
False accusation blush."

Do any of us flatter ourselves that vice can escape punishment? Let us learn, once for all, that —

"The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us."

Would we know the reason why God punishes the guilty? It is because "the gen-

the arrows in the mighty hand of God " are intended to *heal* the wounds which they inflict; and when adversity is accepted with wise submission as the natural consequence of our ill deserts, then even adversity —

" Like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in its head."

In more than one passage Shakespeare brings home to us the truth that —

" To wilful men
The injuries that they themselves procure
Must be their schoolmasters."

Again, are we in need of comfort if sometimes we find our thoughts tormented by evil suggestions? In the "Pilgrim's Progress" Christian, as he walked through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, was sore troubled because an evil spirit was whispering into his ear the blasphemies which he feared might be his own. Might he not have learned from Shakespeare the consola-

tion that involuntary suggestions, which we repudiate with horror, involve no personal guilt, since —

“’Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus,
Another thing to fall.”

Do we desire to have impressed upon our hearts the truth that self-control, self-mastery, self-possession, the acquiring of ourselves, is the secret of all noble life? Then let us ponder the rule, —

“To thine own self be true,
And it must follow as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.”

Would we shun the curse of inconsistency? Was the truth ever more beautifully expressed than in the lines, —

“How sour sweet music is
When time is broke and no proportion kept!
So is it in the music of men’s lives.”

Would we be warned against bargaining with God in favor of any sinful reserva-

tion? Hear the guilty, adulterous king exclaim: —

“ May one be pardoned and retain the offence?
In the corrupted currents of the world,
Offence's gilded hand may shove by justice.
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above:
There is no shuffling, there the action lies
In his true nature, and we ourselves compelled,
Even to the teeth and forehead of our faults,
To give in evidence.”

How powerfully does this passage teach us the immeasurable difference between mere remorse and genuine repentance! Sin must be forsaken before it can be forgiven; consequently the murderous usurper, unable to pray, rises from his knees with the wearied, despairing confession, —

“ My words fly up, my thoughts remain below;
Words without thoughts never to Heaven go.”

Would we learn that the true secret of happiness is within, not without us? Hear the saintly Henry VI. exclaim, —

“My crown is in my heart, not on my head;
Not decked with diamonds and Indian stones,
Nor to be seen. My crown is call Content.
A crown it is that seldom kings enjoy.”

It would take me many pages to pursue this part of the subject, for the writings of Shakespeare are more thickly strewn than those of any other poet who ever lived with such Orient pearls as these. But it is important to observe *two things* about the *florilegium* of exquisite isolated passages, full of concentrated wisdom and keen insight, which might so abundantly be collected from the works of our great dramatist.

1. In the first place these passages, which are on all lips, are never fine things uttered for the sake of saying fine things. There is never anything of the attitudinizing element in Shakespearean wisdom. He never goes out of his way to drag in some magnificent passage. His grandest utterances are never of the nature of purple

patches sewn on some threadbare robe, of which they only serve by contrast to reveal the poverty. They always occur naturally, and, so to speak, spontaneously. They arise from the subject itself, and are exactly congruous to the characters of those who give expression to them, and the emotions by which they are called forth. Hence the lustre and preciousness of these jewels is enhanced tenfold if we take them in their proper setting. They acquire fresh force and beauty from the surroundings, which give them a deeper meaning than they can have apart from the total lesson conveyed by the plays or scenes in which we find them. A reader who knew Shakespeare only from these isolated gems would know but little of his greatness, or of the lessons which he was raised up to teach from thenceforth to all time and to all the world.

2. And in the second place, these beautiful passages, these wise sayings, always

impress us with their own intense reality and sincerity. *They are never second-hand*; they never arise from an attempt to clothe in striking language either the commonplaces of universal experience or the floating reminiscences of acquired knowledge. They are the ripe fruit of personal attainment. They were won through sorrow and struggle. They speak from the heart to the heart. They have been tested by the events of actual life and very real suffering.

It is true that Shakespeare's dramatic utterances belong to the characters of those who speak them, and fall into their natural place; so that we can never quote a sentiment as *his* without reference to the personage into whose lips the words are put, or the circumstances by which they were elicited. Nevertheless, all the most serious and valuable of his immortal aphorisms have an independent worth. Shakespeare reveals himself even while he hides

himself. The mere dates of his plays show the age at which they were written, and the varying circumstances of his life. They fall into four periods, and an immeasurable difference in tone of mind separates his early comedies from his later works. "Love's Labour's Lost," and "The Comedy of Errors"—even "A Midsummer Night's Dream," and "The Two Gentlemen of Verona"—written in the first period of his life (1588-1590), when he was still in the gay buoyancy of his early manhood, are widely separated in their general characteristics from "The Merchant of Venice," "Henry V.," and "All's Well that Ends Well," which belong to the second period (1598-1602).

These again have in them none of the tempestuous passion and intense realization of life's insoluble mysteries that we find in "Hamlet," in "Measure for Measure," "Othello," "Macbeth," "Lear," and "Timon of Athens," which belong to the

third period of his career (1602-1608). It is not till "The Tempest," written about 1610 — in which Shakespeare bids farewell to his art and practically breaks his magic wand — that we find the calm and ripe serenity of advancing years in one who by that time had escaped from the stormy billows, and, even if it were "with difficult scant breath," was able to look back from the shore at their raging foam. Shakespeare was born in 1564, and he was not far off from fifty years of age when he wrote his last play. He died in 1616, perhaps on his fifty-third birthday.

No man can absolutely hide from the world the true character of his mind. A mask may be close-fitting, yet it has an awkward way of slipping off at unguarded moments. But wherever and however Shakespeare reveals himself in his plays, it may be regarded as certain that he displays his inner life, with all its troubles, most decisively in his "Son-

nets." They were probably written between 1592-1602, and they breathe forth such passion as could not have been simulated. However many be the problems with which their interpretation is surrounded, it is in these Sonnets that we hear the accents of the man himself; and they show us that Shakespeare had devoted a passionately enthusiastic and chivalrous devotion — such as was more common in ancient than in modern times, and in Southern than in Northern climates — to a beautiful youth, and also to a dark but enchanting woman; and that both affections had been treacherously betrayed. It is in the struggles through which the soul of Shakespeare passed during this period of storm and stress that we find the most decisive moment of his spiritual and mental career. It is to the feelings then evoked that we owe the atmosphere of lurid mystery and Titanic emotion which overhangs the chief plays

of his third period. It is a happy thing to observe that amid such tempests his inner convictions of religion and his practical good sense gained the complete victory; and he was thus enabled to attain to a peaceful and prosperous middle age.

Though he by no means won immediate appreciation from all his contemporaries, yet his great fellow-poet, Ben Jonson, wrote of him:—

“I confess thy writings to be such
As neither man nor muse can praise too much,”

and hazarded the prophecy which has been so amply fulfilled:—

“He was not of an age, but for all time !”

If in these papers I succeed in inspiring my readers with a deeper sense of the boundless wealth of wisdom that lies in those works of Shakespeare which, in these happy days, they may purchase for a few shillings, I shall have conferred on them an

unquestionable service, both positive and negative.

It will be a *positive* service, because if they learn the best lessons which perhaps the greatest of Englishmen of genius has to teach them, they may be —

“ Richer possessing such a jewel
Than twenty seas though all their sands were pearl,
Their waters nectar, and their rocks pure gold.”

It will be a *negative* service, because they will certainly thus be weaned from attempting to circumnavigate “the shoreless lakes of human ditch-water,” and will find that they may gain an endowment of happiness, incomparably richer and more eternal, from the ennobling study of a few great books than from the frivolous triviality which wastes time over multitudes of worthless ones.

In my last paper I said something about Shakespeare in general, and pointed to the number of isolated passages that embalm

immortal truths in perfect utterance. In the next paper I will say something about one or two of his plays regarded as a whole. In the present paper, by way of specimen, I wish to call attention to the colossal force and deep meaning of a few separate scenes.

I. It should be observed that the glory and meaning of these scenes never result from their being dragged into the play by predetermination. The plays were not written for the sake of these scenes; but the scenes evolve themselves naturally and, so to speak, spontaneously from the progress of the drama. Shakespeare scarcely ever invented the main story of his plays. He usually borrowed it from existing materials — whether of history or of fiction. But, while he was frequently indebted to English or Italian predecessors for the general outlines of his dramas, he imagined for himself the characters of the men and women whose destinies he intended to illustrate. He was thus enabled, by his unparalleled insight

into the workings of the human heart, to leave these *Dramatis Personæ* to evolve the situations by which he carries out his proper functions as a poet and dramatist, which were "to hold as 'twere, the mirror up to nature."

The men and women of Shakespeare move, act, and speak on his dramatic stage exactly as they would do on the stage of the world. We see in their self-determined destinies an epitome of life itself.

1. Let our first scene be taken from "Measure for Measure." It illustrates with most salutary power the weakening, depraving, disintegrating effects of self-indulgence upon the mind of a youth whose training and moral instruction would, but for this evil bias, have made him capable of nobler things. It shows us also how, in a mind thus vitiated, the first natural instinct of nobler disdain for what is infamous is rapidly perverted by the soft pleadings of a sensual egotism. Claudio has impaired in himself the determination to do right, and at

all costs to shame the devil, partly because his lot is cast amid evil surroundings in Vienna, which has become a sink of iniquity, and partly because he has freely yielded to temptation. So necessary is the effort to ameliorate the condition of the perverted city that a law has been passed by the Duke which condemns sensual offenders to death. By this law Claudio is sentenced to forfeit his life. Angelo, the remorseless deputy, is impervious to every consideration of compassion for Claudio's youth, spent as it has been amid the universal atmosphere of the impurity to which he has succumbed. Claudio has a saintly sister named Isabella, who is about to enter a monastery; and "the precise Angelo" — whose mercilessness is only the cloak of a deeply seated hypocrisy — in spite of his reputation for stainless purity, offers her the dreadful alternative of saving her brother's life if she will sacrifice her own honor. This proposal she repudiates with indignant

horror, and having thus failed in her intercession, she goes to the prison to prepare her brother for immediate death. He has strung up his resolution to die bravely; but when he asks, "Is there *no* remedy?" she is obliged to tell him that there *is*, but that it is such a remedy "as to save a head would cleave a heart in twain." He could, indeed, in one way free himself from death, but only at the cost of fettering him to shame for life. He wants to know what the remedy is; and then Isabella's misgivings about him find expression. She tells him frankly that she fears lest the fond clinging to life should give a fatal bias to his moral judgment, and she bids him remember that "the sense of death is most in apprehension." This makes him indignant. He asks:—

"Why give you me this shame?
Think you I can a resolution fetch
From flowery tenderness? If I must die,
I will encounter darkness as a bride,
And hug it in mine arms."

“There spake my brother!” exclaims Isabella — rendered more confident by his asseveration — “there my father’s grave did utter forth a voice.” She tells him the alternative offered by Angelo; but alas! instead of blazing into indignation, he only expresses surprise, and with a deplorable giving way of every moral barrier, begins to minimize the heinousness of the sin, and to argue that, if Angelo proposed it, it cannot be so very terrible. Then he reverts at once to the awfulness of death; and when his sister reminds him that a shamed life is even more hateful, he gives rein to his imagination, and lets it revel in descriptions of the chill horribleness of the grave, and of all that lies beyond it. Finally he implores his sister to let him live, and basely argues that a vice almost becomes a virtue when it is committed to save a brother’s life. Then, indeed, all the pent-up shame and bitter disappointment of the holy maiden bursts forth! “O you beast!” she cries, —

“O faithless coward! O dishonest wretch!
Die, perish! Might but my bending down
Reprieve thee from thy fate, it should proceed.
I'll pray a thousand prayers for thy death,
No word to save thee.”

And in spite of his cry of anguish that she would stay and hear him, she rushes forth from the prison and leaves him.

But how thrilling an illustration does the scene supply of the rotting away and sapping of the soul by unlawful indulgence. Sins are never single; they are linked together by inextricable meshes. *Quem uno peccato contentum vidisti?* asks St. Augustine. The youth, who had already proved himself too weak to resist the voice of conscience, passes from the pusillanimity of self-indulgence to such base fear of death as makes him ready to clutch at any chance of life, even if it were at the expense of his sister's ruin. What a lurid warning have we here to bring home to us that he who wilfully makes but “a little nick” in his

conscience, will not be long ere, under the stress of temptation, he is prepared to murder it forever by a deadly gash! The *one* devil which a youth has willingly admitted into his soul, even if for a moment it seem to be ejected, is certain to return into the empty shrine in the company of seven other devils more wicked than itself, so that unless he be seriously on his guard, the last state of that man will be worse than the first.

2. The next scene which we will notice is Shakespeare's study of the beginnings of drunkenness, and of the ruin which it works. And though in the absence of "ardent spirits," which had not yet been discovered, the state of things in Shakespeare's days was not one hundredth part so disgraceful as it is in ours, yet Shakespeare keenly felt the shame of drunkenness as a national vice. He makes Iago say that "your German, your Dane, and your swagbellied Hollander" are not nearly so "potent in potting" as your Englishman; and this

he says although he makes Hamlet remark of the Danes: —

“ They clepe us drunkards, and with swinish phrase,
Soil our additions.” ●

But before I point the moral of this particular scene, let me pause to sweep away the silly and superficial error that Shakespeare thought lightly of intemperance. Again and again, and in many different ways, he shows us that he was well aware of its deadliness and loathsomeness. No wise man regards total abstinence as a fetish, but only as a special duty of patriotism and charity in his own particular case, because he specially desires to help in awakening the national conscience, and because he hopes by the force of his own example to save and strengthen other individual souls which have got entangled in the snare of the fowler. But many an ignorant denouncer of total abstinence thinks that he has quite crushed its defenders when he has

quoted from Shakespeare the words, "Because thou art virtuous, shall there be no more cakes and ale?" Well, but in whose mouth does Shakespeare put that quite irrelevant jibe? Into the mouth of a helpless and imbecile drunkard, the most absolutely contemptible character whom he has ever attempted to set forth, — Sir Toby Belch! Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek are, as their names intimate, two wretched and deplorable sots. Sir Toby is a cousin of Olivia, the heroine; and in her conversation with Viola she describes the abyss of worthlessness into which her cousin has fallen, and agrees with the Clown that a drunken man is like a drowned man, a fool, and a madman.

If there be any who are content to leave England to her national curse and her national crime without one effort to save her, such persons find a worthy advocate in the paltry creature who represents the very druff and dregs of human nature in its low-

est humiliation. They will also find that Shakespeare puts "the good creature of God" argument into the mouth of his vilest criminal, Iago, and the plea for "freedom" into that of the half-human monster, Caliban.

Again and again Shakespeare shows on which side his sympathies would have lain had he lived in our day. When in "As You Like It" the aged Adam, in his robust and ruddy health, offers his services to his master, Orlando, he says:—

"Though I look old, yet I am strong and lusty,
For in my youth I never did apply
Hot and rebellious liquors in my blood,
Nor did not with unbashful forehead woo
The means of weakness and debility.
Therefore my age is as a lusty winter,
Frosty, but kindly."

And Henry V., the chief hero of Shakespeare's historical plays, was so afraid of having drunken soldiers, that he wished every vine in France might be cut down.

Nor must any one be misled as to Shake-

sppeare's feelings on the subject by the wit of Falstaff. Genial as the fat old knight was, and much as Shakespeare evidently delighted in evolving his witty utterances, he is yet represented as a hopeless reprobate, — a cheat, a coward, a liar, an intriguer. In the "Merry Wives of Windsor" every species of scorn and contumely is heaped upon him; and he meets with his deserved retribution when the Prince—who has tolerated and been amused by his humors, and by whom, on his accession to the kingdom, Falstaff expects to be promoted and enriched—turns upon him with the grave rebuke:—

"I know thee not, old man! fall to thy prayers!
How ill white hairs become a fool and jester!
I have long dreamt of such a kind of man,
So surfeit-swelled, so old and so profane,
But being awaked I do despise my dream."

Then first the gray-haired sinner realizes that there is to be no more boon companionship between him and the hero-king!

The wit of Falstaff did not atone for his radical despicableness in the eyes of the Prince, who stands as Shakespeare's ideal of practical manliness, and who expresses the sentiments of the poet himself.

But I will pass to the special scene which I meant to bring forward. Iago, being a determined villain, has made up his mind to take revenge upon Othello, and if possible utterly to ruin him. This intended vengeance is based upon the false and foul suspicion of an intrigue of which Othello is entirely innocent, and which has no existence except in the diseased brain of Iago, who has sold himself to do iniquity. He is also determined to further his miserable chances of promotion by casting suspicion on Cassio, who holds a higher office than himself. He thus tries to entrap Cassio in a very stake-net of hell. His object is to create in the mind of Cassio a guilty love for Desdemona; and if Cassio is too faithful and noble for such a crime, yet to

awaken a jealous rage against him in the rash and simple soul of Othello. Meanwhile, *pour passer le temps*, he is determined to snare him into drunkenness. He has a stoup of wine, and invites Cassio to drink to Othello's health. But Cassio is no drunkard; he has a dread of intemperance, and answers, "Not to-night, good Iago! I have very poor and unhappy brains for drinking. I could well wish courtesy would invent some other way of entertainment." As Iago still presses him, he says he has drunk but one cup, and it has already produced on his brain more disorder than he likes. "I am," he says, "unfortunate in my infirmity, and dare not task my weakness any more." But Iago tells him it is a night of revels, and, with weak complaisance, Cassio at last yields. Iago knows that now he has him in his power; for he has already caused some young Cyprian gallants to be flushed with wine, and has so managed that, when once Cassio has become intoxicated, a quarrel is

certain to ensue. So he sings his hilarious drinking-songs, and keeps calling for more wine, till Cassio has reached first the silly and then the quarrelsome stage of drunkenness. He then maligns Cassio to Montano, and in the ensuing disturbance Cassio wounds Montano. Othello appears on the scene in high indignation at such an unseemly disturbance in a town of war. He hears a garbled account of what has occurred, and then and there dismisses Cassio from his office of lieutenant. The blow and the disgrace have sobered Cassio; and he wails to Iago that in losing his reputation he has "lost the immortal part of himself, and that which remains is bestial." In terrible remorse, utterly ashamed of himself, he cries, "Drunk? and speak parrot? and squabble? swear? and discourse fustian with one's own shadow? O thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be called by, let us call thee — devil." And again, "O God, that men should put an

enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains! That we should with joy, pleasure, revel, and applause, transform ourselves into beasts." "To be now a sensible man, by and by a fool, and presently a beast! O strange! Every inordinate cup is unblessed, and the ingredient a devil!"

Was ever a stronger temperance sermon preached than this? This is what Shakespeare thought of the evil of drink, and the warning is all the more intense because the gallant soldier who has thus fallen and been ruined is naturally an honorable and noble man. Cassio has not sought the temptation, but been seduced into it by a semblance of good fellowship, and because he has not had the strength of mind to utter, and persist in, a hearty "No." Every custom which destroyed the weak under the semblance of sociability was in Shakespeare's opinion —

"A custom
More honored in the breach than in the
observance,"

as he makes Hamlet say of the boisterous health-drinking of the Danish Court. He would undoubtedly have said from his own experience, as good Father Mathew said, "Through drink I have seen the stars of heaven fall, and the cedars of Lebanon laid low."

3. In Macbeth we have the lesson of a soul's destruction inculcated with unparalleled power. When the play opens Macbeth is a successful and loyal warrior. The witches hail him as Thane of Cawdor, and as one who shall be "king hereafter." The first prophecy is immediately fulfilled, and the seed of evil ambition is at once implanted in the warrior's mind. The thought that he may become king by murdering the gracious Duncan presents itself to him, and he cries, —

"Why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair,
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
Against the use of nature?"

The only safety would have been imperiously to reject the execrable temptation, and resolutely to trample it out of his soul. Not so Macbeth! He tampers and dallies with it. When Duncan appoints his heir Prince of Cumberland, Macbeth is goaded on the career of criminal purpose by regarding this as a stumbling-block in the path of his ambition. The evil suggestion which is gradually rooting itself in his soul springs into full life in the mind of Lady Macbeth. She, at least, is determined that no scruples shall hinder her, but that she will at once "catch the nearest way." Then, as always, the tempting opportunity leaps up face to face with the susceptible disposition. For she has scarcely formed her deadly purpose when the announcement is brought that the king proposes to stay at the castle of Macbeth as his guest. And very soon the temptation sweeps all before it, in spite of the murderer's hesitations. Macbeth is ready indeed, "upon the brink and shoal of

time," to "jump the life to come." But he is well aware that —

"In this case

We still have judgment *here*;"

and that —

"Even-handed justice

Commends the ingredients of the poisoned chalice
To our own lips."

Yet, in spite of these twinges of remorse and spasms of fear, the warrior has so readily suffered the evil thought to become the evil wish and the evil purpose, and to seize him with irresistible dominion, that, goaded on by the stronger determination of his wife, he at last, with open eyes, commits the criminal, irrevocable deed. Surely no concrete warning could more powerfully enforce the lesson, "Resist the beginnings of evil," and the truth that "the beginning of sin is as the letting out of water." But further, Shakespeare illustrates the words of Christ, that "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts;" and then—as if the floodgates of sin had been opened wide —

the evil thoughts are followed by murders, adulteries, and every form of crime. To what writer has it ever been given to add more awful emphasis to the rule —

“Guard well thy thoughts, for thoughts are
heard in heaven” ?

I have selected but three separate scenes to show the mighty intellectual force which Shakespeare wields that he may inculcate the duty of watchfulness and the supreme blessedness of moral integrity. I might have selected multitudes of other scenes no less powerful; but these will suffice to illustrate how much every earnest reader may gain from the wisdom of one who can only be ranked with Dante and with Milton, among the greatest of the Teachers of Mankind.

I now turn to the lessons taught in Shakespeare's plays as a whole. The meaning of life comes to us mostly in great revealing flashes and intense emo-

tions. Imagine the poorest and commonest of our rude sailor boys, trained from infancy in a home of rough hardship, coarse in manner, it may be ignorant in mind, rude in speech, with nothing grand about him except his humanity. He steps ashore after long toils on the stormy seas, and lo! as he enters his native village, "heart-shaking news meets him in long accumulated arrears," and, rushing up to the little churchyard, the poor lad flings himself in a passion of sobs and tears upon his mother's grave. Is he not, as it were, transfigured by that sorrow? Is not his whole being illuminated at that moment into something of tragic and poetic grandeur, which shows that "poor humanity" is greater than we know, as it struggles in vain with apparently ruthless destiny? Much of all our lives, and all of some men's lives, is, —

"A life of nothings, nothing worth,
From that first nothing ere our birth,
To that last nothing under earth."

If this were all, we are hardly better than the animals, and might ask with Shakespeare, —

“What is man

If his chief use and market of his time,
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.”

We must be roused out of this corrupting delusion of earthiness, which Bunyan represents by his man with the muck-rake; or else, —

“To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The road to dusty death.”

Now Shakespeare will help us, as no other secular writer can, to realize the awful reality and solemnity of our existence. There are no shams in his presentment of life as it is—no sickly fetish-worship; no miserable conventions; no namby-pamby make-believes. He does not think that life can be explained by a

few rose-pink sentimentalities. He "holds, as it were, a mirror up to nature." He portrays manhood, alike in its grandeur and in its littleness, as now it "bursts of great heart," and now "slips in sensual mire."

If we read Shakespeare only as a dramatist who wrote plays to be represented for our amusement on the boards of a theatre, we know nothing of him. "He saw life steadily, and saw it whole." As we pass through his plays in chronological order, from the airy, fantastic laughter of "Love's Labour's Lost," to the serene and mellow wisdom of the "Tempest," we can trace how — amid experiences of life often intensely bitter, and through temptations that came with awful force to his vivid temperament — Shakespeare had not only grown year after year in mental stature, but had also learned moral soberness and spiritual wisdom. As Goethe said, "His plays are much more than poems. The

reader seems to have before him the books of fate, against which is beating the tempest of eager life, so as to drive the leaves backwards and forwards with violence." And his plays became more deep in awful meaning as his life went on. Sir Walter Raleigh, in some memorable pages of the Preface to his "History of the World," traces the vindication of the moral order, the glory of faithfulness, and the certain Nemesis of evil-doing in the lives of our English kings; but how much more powerfully is this set forth in Shakespeare's historic plays! He illustrates for us with incomparable art and power the sure workings of the law of retribution, not by way of arbitrarily administered reward or punishment, but in the way of the natural consequences and outcome of human deeds.

Shakespeare's historic plays do not rise to the incomparable grandeur of some of his later tragedies of passion. Yet no

writer has ever surpassed the lessons of moral wisdom at which we may arrive by studying the normal results of good or of evil doing, as he delineates them in the fortunes of King John the hypocritical dastard, and Richard II. the fantastic dreamer, and Richard III. the open villain, and Henry VI. the feeble and unmanly saint, and Henry V. the prosaic but resolute and practical well-doer. This young hero-king evidently attained to Shakespeare's highest ideal of manly and victorious integrity of life as a ruler and as a man.

Into five especially of the plays that belong to the closing epochs of his life, Shakespeare has poured his most Titanic conceptions of the evil of the world, and what it means. Those plays are "Hamlet," "Timon of Athens," "Othello," "Macbeth," and "King Lear." Of the lessons of Hamlet, and of the fine curses of Timon, "with his noble heart, which strongly loathing greatly broke," I will not now

speak. At the other three plays we will, by way of illustration, cast a passing glance.

I. In "OTHELLO" Shakespeare has given us his most finished picture of a full-blown and irredeemable scoundrel, the only absolute and quite unmitigated incarnation of moral evil whom he has portrayed. Iago is a sensual egotist, who, because he disbelieves wholly in goodness, and chooses to foster in his own mind a suspicion equally vile and groundless, entraps one after another of the innocent to their ruin, and becomes a very demon of iniquity, doing the devil's authentic work. He has not enough belief even to create remorse in him. Malignity and animalism suffice this human Mephistopheles. Lodovico calls him "a viper and a hellish villain," and he is the only monster entirely without one gleam of a redeeming feature whom Shakespeare has delineated. Othello, disillusioned at last from the envenomed

spell, looks at the man who has destroyed him, and says : —

“I look down towards his feet — but that’s a fable.
If that thou be’st a devil I cannot kill thee.”

And again : —

“Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil
Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body?”

Iago is a specimen of those “men slugs and human serpentry” of whom Keats speaks. He feeds on dust, and by the potent alchemy of his own baseness transmutes it into venom. Of course, as befalls all such “human serpentry” in the long run, his own head is crushed. But while all our sympathy and love are for the victims, whose innocence he has plunged into sin, into rashness, and into uttermost ruin, we can hardly feel one spark of pity for this clever, successful, atrocious reprobate when he is tortured and executed amid our uttermost loathing. For Desde-

mona, for Cassio, for rash, honest Othello, "crushed and beaten to their ruin by this demon's anger stern," we have nothing but heartfelt compassion; and thus the inherent majesty of goodness asserts itself as the one supreme thing to be sought after, even amid the deadly triumph of wickedness. A writer who thus intensely, and by the direct grandeur of his art, convinces us that, as Milton says,

"If Virtue feeble were,
Heaven itself would stoop to her,"

furnishes us with the strongest possible arguments for our inherent belief in God and immortality, and thus teaches us the most solemn and eternal lessons.

II. Again, Shakespeare's "MACBETH" is the tragedy of "Sin its own avenger." It sets before us in lurid illumination the horrors of a guilty conscience scourging the offender with whips and scorpions, and making the murderer his own executioner.

Remorse afflicts the man who is tampering with his first experience of crime, and "when the pleasure has been tasted and is gone, and nothing is left of the crime but the ruin it has wrought, then, too, the Furies take their seats upon the midnight pillow!" And Shakespeare teaches us this law of the moral world with a force that thrills our deepest hearts. But "Macbeth" is also a study of *temptation*. All sin begins in the consent of the evil that is within us to the suggestion that comes from without us. "The tempting opportunity always meets the susceptible disposition." Macbeth's passion to be king, even at the cost of bloody treachery, is stimulated by the juggling prophecy of the three witches. He entertains the evil thought, till it has become the evil wish and the evil purpose. He is further stimulated to the actual abhorrent crime by the stern determination of his wife, till the two, in spite of the fierce recalcitration

of their own alarmed consciences, murder their king and guest, the gracious Duncan.

Feeling the awful ghastliness of the crime into which he had thus been led, Macbeth cries : —

“Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? Nay, this my hand will
rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red.”

On the other hand, Lady Macbeth, in contemplation of her husband’s shrinking conscience, cries, “A little water clears of this deed!” But she, too, lives to find, in the agonies of dreaming sleep, that not even all the perfumes of Arabia will sweeten her little hand from the sickening taint of blood which she imagines herself to have washed away at once with a few drops of water.

Thus Macbeth exhibits “that frightful page in the book of human destinies of which the head-line is ‘Desires Accom-

plished.'” That page cannot but be a “frightful” one, in spite of any apparent immediate fruition, when the desires are wicked, and when they have been accomplished by deeds of guilt. But in that curse of a criminal desire, criminally fulfilled, we read not only the lesson:—

“I swear ’tis better to be lowly born,
And range with humble livers in content,
Than to be perked up in a glistening grief
And wear a golden sorrow;—

but, much more, we have the delineation of crime through all its stages — temptation, glamour, the maturing of the evil wish, the spasm of the guilty act, and the agony of disillusionment, which instantly follows.

“Had I but died an hour before this chance,
I had lived a blessed time !”

But the immediate disillusionment, however agonizing, is as nothing; for on the

heels of it come the hauntings of ghostly shame, the permanence of horror, the turning to venomous ashes of the fruit guiltily plucked; last of all, retributive catastrophe, coming down like a thunderclap, puts an end to unutterable despair. Macbeth stands before us a haggard, miserable criminal, sick of life, and mockingly betrayed by the powers of evil, in which he has trusted. Unlike Iago, he still believes in the goodness, the forfeiture of which haunts him, and makes him feel that "fruit is seed," that he is only reaping the harvest of what he himself has sown.

He felt that the heart of the wicked is a troubled sea. Iago, like a fiend, is content to stand out vividly, as long as may be, in the glare of the hell which he has deliberately chosen, and which for a time suffices him; but Macbeth *feels* hell to be hell, and it is in agony that he would have cried with the fallen Archangel of Milton:—

“Which way I fly 'is hell, myself am hell;
And, in the lowest deep, a lower deep
Still threatening to devour me opens wide,
To which the hell I suffer seems a heaven.”

III. Lastly, let us glance for one moment at the stupendous play of “*KING LEAR*”—that tragedy of tragedies, that tragedy of storm and tempest which sets before us the earthquake and eclipse, the catastrophe and conflagration, of every element of human happiness. A lovelier picture of womanly faith and tenderness than Cordelia, the daughter of King Lear, even Shakespeare never drew. And her pure daughterly love the old foolish king, in his rash autocracy and ungovernable egotism, has flung away. And there lies Cordelia, strangled on the bosom of her sire, and the poor, mad, hunted, deserted, disrowned king tears his thin white locks and sobs over the murdered corpse in vain. It is only after hurricanes of calamity that he awakes to find, too late, the priceless treas-

ure of a true daughter's tenderness, which in his folly he has spurned from him for counterfeits so deadly as the foul and lustful selfishness of a Goneril and a Regan. Dr. Johnson was so disappointed with this termination of the play that he would not read it a second time, and approved of the audacity with which a poor poetaster like Nahum Tate altered it for the stage to a happy ending.

Yet the conceptions of Shakespeare were far sublimer and more true to life. He does not stop to console us with the hopes of the life behind the dark curtains of death. In this stupendous picture of human ruin, in which —

“As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods,
They kill us for their sport,”

Shakespeare has deliberately excluded the possibility of any allusion to the heaven beyond the grave which shall, for the innocent, redeem the frightful ruin of this

life by the unimaginable bliss of a life to come. For the England of King Lear is supposed to be an England of Pagans who have never heard of Christianity. But had it been otherwise, Shakespeare would only have weakened the intense force of the lesson which he designed to teach, which was that, even if there were *no* life to come, yet — if we were nothing but creatures of a day — “evil is abnormal, and a curse which brings down destruction upon itself.” Shakespeare shows us innocence and nobleness entangled in the very stake-net of hell, but he never wavers for one instant in his estimate of right and wrong. He has no little platitudes to offer us; he does not pretend to account for the mystery of things as though he were “God’s spy.”

Yet, taking the facts of the world simply and resolutely as they are, in all their unutterable, inexplicable pathos, he exalts and purifies us, because, in spite of all the pity

and the terror, he still shows us the immortality of goodness, and its certain victory, in the midst of apparently irretrievable defeats. Never was there a more tragic figure than that of King Lear. "What a figure!" exclaims Victor Hugo, "what a caryatid! He is the man bent down, and ever exchanging one burden for another yet more crushing. The more feeble the old man grows, the more the weight augments. He is overburdened by the load, first of empire, then of ingratitude, then of isolation, then of despair, then of hunger and thirst, then of madness, then of all nature. The clouds still roll over his head, the forests overwhelm him with their shade, the hurricane beats upon his white hair, the rain and the storm drench his mean garments, and he walks along bent and haggard, as if the two knees of the night were on his back." There are times when to all of us, as to King Lear, may come the temptation to think that —

"Life is but a tale,
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

But we are prevented from succumbing to such despair, because — as Shakespeare by his art shows us, and as he had himself learnt of God — that even apart from eternal hopes, the right still differs from the wrong, not by mere "preferability," but by an immeasurable difference of divine superiority. Faith and goodness still burn through the midnight, and triumph over it. Even when good, true men seem most hopelessly overwhelmed, he bids us see that "over such sacrifices, the gods themselves throw incense." It is the lesson of the Psalmists, of the Book of Job, of the noblest chapters in the story of Daniel, of the Epistles, of the Apocalypse, of all martyrdoms, yes, of the very Cross of Christ Himself. The man who is content to live in the smug self-satisfaction of a prosperity acquiescent in earthliness, self-deceived by a sham reli-

gion; — the ignoble trimmer, who is determined at all costs not to suffer even for righteousness' sake — knows absolutely nothing of the meaning of life. He may complacently circumnavigate the vast and miry shallows of human life, but he will never obtain the faintest glimpse of any Island of the Blest. Shakespeare shows us that, even were there no eternity hereafter, it were still better to be Cordelia, strangled in prison, than to enjoy "those deadly egoisms" of Goneril and Regan in their purple, and wearing their adulterous crowns. We would rather lie dead beside sweet Desdemona, or self-stabbed with rash but honest Othello, than exult and triumph with the thrice-execrable Iago.

We would rather be the gracious Duncan, lying there murdered at midnight, his white hair dabbled with his gore, and

"His silver skin laced with his golden blood,"

than be his haggard and haunted murderer.

We would choose to be King Lear, "in his weakness, his unreason, his affliction, his poverty and madness," rather than Edmund, even at the summit of his success, with his thought, "active as a virulent acid, eating its rapid way through all the tissues of human sentiment."

That is one of the consummate lessons which Shakespeare had learnt from the book of God. Faithfulness and innocence are above all earthly reward. Whatever earth may heap upon man of agony, "whether his faithfulness palpitates with light, or seems to be quenched in darkness," virtue is always its own exceeding great reward. The righteous have set their hearts on other things than riches, or success, or the praise of men. To these they rarely attain. It is their much commoner lot to live "belied in a hubbub of lies," and die disappointed of every earthly hope. But they do attain, and that always — as the bad, amid their awful retribution, cannot attain

— to what is transcendently happier, and infinitely more precious; — even to the tranquil and never-to-be-shaken conviction that all is and all must be well. Yes! even in the lion's den; yes, even amidst the hottest fires of Smithfield; yes, amid the worst wrenches of the wrack of this tough world, they know the glory of spiritual happiness! The peace of God which passeth all understanding is only within the reach of those who, because they are faithful to the best they know, feel that the Eternal God is their refuge, and underneath them are the everlasting arms. And this is the truth which, in his own way, the great dramatist desires to bring home to our conscience.

Shakespeare, in his last will and testament, wrote, "I commend my soul into the hands of God my Creator, hoping and assuredly believing, through the only merits of Jesus Christ my Saviour, to be made partaker of life everlasting." I believe that he would have subscribed from his heart to

those strong words of Robert Browning, the poet of our own day who was most akin to him in manly genius and sincerity, that —

“ The acknowledgment of God in Christ,
Accepted by the reason, solves for thee
All problems in the world and out of it,
And has, so far, advanced thee to be wise.”

CHAPTER IV.

DANTE.

THE INFERNO.

DANTE was not only great, but one of the greatest of religious teachers. He was great in himself; he has been called "the Voice of Ten Silent Centuries." He was so great, and so conscious of his own greatness, that, in his "Inferno," he calmly places himself among the six foremost poets, known to him, of all the ages; and posterity has fully ratified his judgment. What might be set down to insane vanity in smaller men, becomes, in the greatest, a calm consciousness of heaven-bestowed endowments. "The man of great soul," says Aristotle, "is one who counts himself worthy of great things, being worthy."



DANTE.

Few have dared to claim this immortality
whom time has not justified in their claim.
Even an Ovid wrote, —

*“Jamque opus exegi, quod nec Jovis ira, nec ignes,
Nec poterit ferrum, nec edax abolere vetustas.”*

Even a Horace could say, “*Exegi monumentum ære perennius.*” Milton determined, while yet a youth, “to write something which the world should not willingly let die.” Bacon, with calm confidence, intrusted his reputation to future ages. Shakespeare says, even of one of his sonnets, —

“Not marble, not the gilded monuments
Of princes, shall outlast this powerful verse.”

And not only was Dante so great in himself, but he deals with the greatest of all subjects, he teaches verities the most awful, and the most eternal. At some few of these we will endeavor to glance.

And, once more, Dante's immortal poem,

"The Divine Comedy," concentrates into itself the essence of many of the most remarkable outcomes of human literature. It more nearly resembles the Apocalypse of St. John than any other book. Like the "Confessions" of St. Augustine and Rousseau, and like the "Samson Agonistes" of Milton, it is, in part, a scarcely veiled autobiography. Like Spenser's "Faerie Queene," it is an allegory. Like Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," it is a vision. Like Goethe's "Faust," it is a soul's history. Like the "Paradise Lost," it embraces Earth and Heaven and Hell. Like Wordsworth's "Excursion," it is —

"A song divine of high and passionate thoughts
To their own music chanted."

It contains, like the works of the Roman Satirists, many political elements. Like the "*De Rerum Natura*" of Lucretius, it sums up all the results of the then exist-

ing knowledge. And these multitudinous elements are all harmoniously fused into one by what Coleridge calls the "esemplastic," the "unifying," force of a supreme imagination. Hence we may well say of the "Divine Comedy" with Dean Church, that "It is one of the landmarks of history.

More than a magnificent poem; more than the beginning of a language, and the opening of a national literature; more than the inspirer of Art, and the glory of a great people, — it is one of those rare and solemn monuments of the mind's power, which measure and test what it can reach to; which rise up, ineffaceably, and forever, as time goes on, marking out its advance by greater divisions than its centuries, and adopted as epochs by the consent of all who come after. They who know it best would wish others also to know the power of that wonderful poem; its austere yet subduing beauty; what force there is in its free, and earnest, and solemn verse to strengthen, to

tranquillize, to compose. Its seriousness has put to shame their trifling; its magnanimity, their faint-heartedness; its living energy, their indolence. Its stern and sad grandeur has rebuked low thoughts; its thrilling tenderness has overcome subtleness and assuaged distress; its strong faith has quelled despair and soothed perplexity; its vast grasp has imputed the sense of harmony to clashing truths." "After holding converse with such grandeur," says Mr. Wicksteed, "our lives can never be so small again."

But if we desire to learn the intense, the infinitely important, the uniquely elevating, lessons which this great poet can impart to us more powerfully than any human teacher except Shakespeare, we must not only read but *study* him. He does not care for ignorant, feeble, otiose readers, whose ordinary *pabulum* is the tenth-rate novel, or the society newspaper, "the prurience of corruption," "the garbage of tittle-tattle,"

or "the stagnant goose-ponds of village gossip." The seed of his poem was sown in tears, and reaped in misery. For many years, he says, it made him lean with thought. He warns off the frivolous and the foolish, and tells them truly, that they will be unable to follow his little bark as it speeds fearlessly on its way through the deep waters of eternity. Like the kindred soul of Milton, he cares only for "fit audience, though few."

But here let me help my readers by two hints.

First as to the name of the poem — why is it called the "Divine Comedy"? The name "Divine" was not given to it by Dante. It expresses the humble admiration of subsequent ages. But he calls it a "Comedy" for two reasons: First, because it differs from tragedy in having a happy ending; for, beginning in the foul abysses of Hell, it ends in the perfect glory of Paradise. Secondly, it was almost the first

poem of the early fourteenth century that was written, not in the learned ecclesiastical Latin, which was then regarded as the only language that scholars could deign to use, but in the vernacular Italian. Perhaps, also, Dante adopted the term "Comedy," because he meant the ordinary style of his poem to be simple and familiar, — so much so that in the first division he not only stoops to the very humblest similes, but freely admits grotesque and ludicrous elements, which now and then descend to broad humor. One canto of the "Inferno" has even been described as "the Pantomime of Hell."

The second hint I have to give is of supremest importance. It was from the complete failure to understand the meaning of the poem, that some men, even men of eminence, have not only been unable to apprehend its greatness, but have even spoken of it with hatred and contempt. Thus Voltaire, who also re-

garded Shakespeare as a sort of drunken savage, called it a bizarre poem, — a “salmagondi,” or hotch-potch. Goethe, with a lack of wisdom and apprehensiveness quite astonishing in so great a man, said that “The ‘Inferno’ is revolting, the ‘Purgatorio’ dull, and the ‘Paradiso’ unreadable.” Walter Savage Landor, in his blustering way, calls the “Inferno” (by a stupidly perverse prejudice) “the most immoral and impious book ever written!”

Against these amazing misjudgments we may set the deliberate opinions of Englishmen like Shelley, Macaulay, Carlyle, Symmonds, Dean Church, and William Ewart Gladstone; of Frenchmen like De Lamennais and Ozanam; of Italians even like Leopardi and Mazzini. Contemptuous opinions running counter to the reverential gratitude felt for the “Divine Comedy,” not only by nearly all great thinkers, but by all Christian nations, are nothing but a proof of the mental limita-

tions of those who utter them. But such futile criticism was always based on a radical misapprehension, which Dante himself corrected nearly six hundred years ago in his letter to Can Grande, Lord of Verona. He pointed out that the poem is not literal but allegorical. "Man," he says in his work on "Monarchy" (III. 15) "stands midway between the corruptible and the incorruptible. His body is corruptible; his spirit is incorruptible. Hence his destinies also are twofold. God has set before him two ends, — the happiness of this life in the earthly Paradise, which may be obtained by virtue, and the happiness of life eternal, which consists in the fruition of the Divine countenance. Human knowledge may help us to attain the first; Divine knowledge, by working in us faith, hope, and charity, can alone help us to attain the second, which was revealed by Jesus Christ. Hence, "if the subject of the whole work," he says, "taken ac-

according to the letter, is the state of souls after death, considered not in a special but in a general sense, — the subject of the whole work *allegorically* is man, liable to the rewards or punishments of justice, according as, through the freedom of the will, he is deserving or undeserving." In that sentence lies the only key to the true meaning and the right interpretation of Dante's "Inferno." The three cantos of his poem are not only and mainly a description of "Hell," "Purgatory," "Paradise;" but in the true and deeper sense they might be called "Sin," "Repentance," "the Beatitude of the purified and forgiven soul."

The chief stumbling-block to the understanding of the "Divine Comedy" has been that, in the "Inferno," readers saw only, as it were, an elaborate description of physical torments. It is nothing of the kind; and Dante never meant it for anything of the kind. He held, indeed, the

views of the whole Church in the Middle Ages, which had never even been questioned. He doubtless believed, with all who lived in his day, that the torments of Hell were literal ice and literal flame, and that they were "eternal" in the sense of being endless. And he lived in terrible times, far less shrinkingly sensitive than ours, and far more accustomed to the almost daily contemplation of physical horrors and agonies. Dante himself had seen a human being burnt alive, and had himself been sentenced to be burnt alive on a false charge. It is not strange that such terrible times had terrible beliefs, and in all those beliefs Dante shared. Whatever Hell may be, we do not believe that it is like the Hell of Dante, a burning slaughter-house, a torture chamber of endless vivisection and worse than inquisitorial horrors invented and elaborated by demon-priests, where souls welter in the crimson ooze of Phle-

gethon, or move about like Nero-torches of animated flame. Nevertheless, under that dreadful imagery, so weird, lurid, and grotesque, lie truths of eternal import. About the horrors and infamies of a material Hell; about the steep ascents of a Purgatory, if such there be; about the glories and employments of the Paradise of God, Dante knew just as much, which is just as little, as ourselves.

But that there is a *moral* Hell and a *moral* Heaven; that Heaven and Hell are tempers and not only places; that they are states of the soul, and not physical fires or golden cities in the far-off blue, he knew, as all must know who have enough of soul left in them undestroyed by vice and worldliness to imagine what God is, and to feel what sin means. Is there not many a man of whom, as of Dante, it might be said, "That man has been in Hell"? Happy the man who, like Dante, has struggled through the abyss where sin is punished,

to the mountain where sin is purged, to the Paradise where it is remembered no more. The poem was not written to give mere poetic pleasure, but to teach and to warn. It was intended to describe not, merely or chiefly, an obscene bodily Hell, or a material Heaven, but to bring home to us the truth that this world *is* the next, in the light of the Eternal Yea and the Eternal Now.

Let me point out at once two lessons which every wise and noble soul may learn from the entire poem.

One is the sense of *the awful transcendency of goodness*,—the sense that good and evil are “the two polar elements of this creation, on which it all turns,” and that they differ “not by preferability of one to the other, but by incompatibility absolute and infinite; that the one is excellent and high as light and Heaven, the other hideous, black as Gehenna and the Pit of Hell.” If you would know how sin and

holiness appeared to one of the grandest of human souls, who had the power also to clothe his symbols in the intensest imagery; if you would be lifted from that base condition of conventionality and compromise in which good and evil are not in real and fierce antagonism, but lie flat together, side by side, in immoral acquiescence and infamous neutrality, — then you may learn a life-long lesson by humble study of the “Divine Comedy.” It strips evil bare from its masks and hypocrisies, that you may see it in all its naked ghastliness; and it shows you what is pure and good in the white intensity, the sevenfold perfection, of undivided light.

The other lesson is the awfulness of sin. Dante knows nothing of the prurient talk about art for art’s sake, still less of its nudities, which are naked and not ashamed. He reveals to us, in the poem, step by step, his own moral ameliorations. He desires to hold up “before men’s awa-

kened and captivated minds the verity of God's moral government. To arouse them to a sense of the mystery of their state; to startle their commonplace notions of sin into an imagination of its variety, its magnitude, and its infinite shapes and degrees; to open their eyes to the beauty of the Christian temper, both as suffering and as consummated; to teach them at once the faithfulness and awful freeness of God's grace; to help the dull and lagging soul to conceive the possibilities, in its own case, of rising, step by step, in joy without an end, of a felicity not unimaginable by man, though of another order from the highest perfection of earth,—this is the poet's end."

With these hints to help us we shall better understand the force, the variety, the stupendous and eternal import of Dante's meaning; and here let me say, in passing, that so far from attempting to exhaust what he has to teach us, I shall

only be able to speak about one or two of his most salient lessons.

And first let us consider the opening scene. The vision narrated in Dante's "Divine Comedy" is supposed to have happened in the year 1300. Dante was then thirty-five. "In the middle of the journey of our life," so he begins, "I found myself astray in a dark wood, for the straight way was lost. Ah! how hard a thing it is to tell how wild, and rough, and stubborn this wood was, which, in thinking of it, renews my fear, bitter almost as death." And while he has thus lost his way, and lost Him who is the way, in this erroneous wood of confused aim and sinful wandering,—the wood in which most of us, alas! spend all our lives,—he reaches the foot of the hill whose summit is bathed in sunshine. The hill is the high ground, the "Delectable Mountain" of faith, of holiness, of moral order, of Christian life; and from

the pass that leads to death Dante turns to, and makes a strenuous effort to climb, the hill. But he is instantly hindered by three wild beasts, — a bright and bounding leopard, with spotted skin, of which he admires the beauty; a lion, that approaches him with head erect and furious anger; and a gaunt she-wolf, that looks full of all cravings in her leanness.

Terrified by these wild beasts, he sees a figure approach him, to whom he appeals for help. This figure is the poet Virgil, who, after dwelling on his peril, tells him that he must follow him. Now, the poem of Dante is crowded by many meanings, but the only one which I shall touch upon is the moral allegory. Of the beasts that would fain drive Dante back from the sunny hill to the dark wood, the leopard is pleasure, the lion is anger, the wolf is the love of money.

“Behold a lion out of the forest shall slay them, a wolf of the evenings shall

spoil them, a leopard shall watch over their cities." Sensuality, passion, avarice, these root-sins have to be conquered before a man can become a true follower of Christ, or climb the mountain of His beatitudes. Virgil is the personification of human wisdom and conscience, — the spirit of imagination and poetry, — able to witness to duty, its discipline, its hopes, and its vindications, but unable to confer grace. And Virgil tells Dante that, at the bidding of his Beatrice, who becomes henceforth the personification of Divine knowledge, he is commissioned to lead him through Hell, where sin is punished, and through Purgatory, where sins are cleansed. In order to be delivered from the seductions and semblances of life, Dante is to be led to see, with his own eyes, the awful eternal realities.

Thus the "Divine Comedy" comprehends all time and all space. It represents the life-history of a human soul redeemed from

sin and error, from lust and wrath and mammon, and restored to the right path by the reason and the grace which enable him to see the things that are, and to see them as they are. The lesson which he thus teaches is analogous to what Marlowe meant in the lines: —

“ Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed
To one self place: but where we are is Hell,
And where Hell is there we shall ever be.
And, to be brief, when all the world dissolves,
And every creature shall be purified,
All places shall be Hell which are not Heaven.”

Similarly the Evil Spirit in Milton wails forth the confession: —

“ Which way I fly is Hell, myself am Hell,
And, in the lowest deep, a lower deep
Still threatening to devour me opens wide,
To which the Hell I suffer seems a heaven.”

and

“What matter where if I be still the same?”

Dante's object, then, in the “Inferno” — the part of the “Divine Comedy” which

has caused most misgivings — is not a cruelly remorseless picture of the future, but a thrilling representation of the present. He wishes to set before us Sin, as the one deadly curse of the universe, both in its nature and its punishment, meaning always to inculcate *this* lesson more than any other, that *Sin is Hell*; that the wilful, willing sinner *is* in hell; and that, so long as a man remains an alien from the love of God, he must say with the Evil Spirit, "Myself am Hell." The vulgar conception of punishment is that it is something external to, and apart from, sin. Dante's conception is that penalty is *the same thing* as sin; it is only sin taken at a later period of its history, only sin taken a little lower down the stream.

The next lesson to which I would point is that which we may learn from the souls which Dante sees in the Ante-Hell.

Passing through the awful gate, they

find themselves in a stained and starless atmosphere, which resounds with sighs and lamentations, voices deep and hoarse, and the sound of smitten hands. Dante asks who are these wailers, so multitudinous that "he would never have believed that death had undone so many." And Virgil tells him that these are "the souls of those who lived without praise and without blame," mixed with the caitiff choir of lost angels, who were faithful neither to God nor to Satan, but cared only for themselves. Heaven chased forth their ugliness ; even Hell spurned their selfish pusillanimity. Their blind life is so despicable that they envy every other lot ; naked, stung by gnats and wasps like the paltry cares of a narrow selfishness in which they had worried through a life which was always dead, they follow in aimless gyrations the flutter of a giddy flag, — the emblem of "what people say," — which they had made the futile guide of

their useless lives. They are the wretched neutrals ; miserales too petty either for praise or blame ; poltroons, waverers, trimmers, caitiffs, rascals, louts, loafers, Facing-both-ways ; men who drift down the stream, like dead fish, instead of swimming against it ; men of the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin ; men utterly stultified and nullified by blank selfish individualism. "They have perished as though they had never been." They are like the woman of whom A. de Musset writes,—

"Elle est morte, et n'a point vécu,
Elle faisait semblance de vivre :
De ses mains est tombé le livre
Dans lequel elle n'a rien lu."

The book of life dropped from her hands, and she had never read it! "Of all unsuccessful men," says Mr. Froude, "in every shape there is none equal to Bunyan's Mr. Facing-both-ways, the fellow with one eye on heaven and one on earth ;

who preaches one thing and does another ; and from the intensity of his unreality is unable to see or feel the contradiction. He is substantially trying to cheat both God and the Devil, and is in reality only cheating himself and his neighbors. This is of all characters upon earth the one of which there is no hope at all, a character in these days alarmingly common, and the abundance of which makes us find even in Rheinecke an inexpressible relief."

If you think Dante too hard on them, remember where St. John puts "the fearful and unbelieving," in Rev. xxi. 8 ; and what the Angel of the Churches said to the Laodicean, "I would that thou wert either cold or hot . . . so then because thou art lukewarm [*χλιαρός*, 'tepid'], and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." No doubt the passage shows that Dante was

"Dowered with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,"

as well as "the love of love ;" but so was Milton ; and Dante does not speak with more passionate disdain than does our own Milton at the end of the "Reformation in England." There, describing a similar class of empty, worthless, narrow-minded, ignorant, and selfish people, he says that "after a shameful end in this life, they shall be thrown down eternally into the deepest and darkest gulf of Hell, where, under the despitiful control, the trample and spurn of all the other damned, they shall remain in that plight forever, the basest, the lowermost, the most dejected, most underfoot and downtrodden vassals of perdition." The lesson is, Do something! Be something! Take your part, not content to be no better than brute beasts, which make it the chief purport of their lives to sleep and feed; or "like sheep or goats that nourish a blind life within the brain."

But when we read the "Divina Com-

media," perhaps we may ask why, in the divisions of the "Inferno," the souls are only punished for *one* type of sin, whereas sins are linked together by a fine network of inextricable meshes, and he who devotes himself to one form of sin is certain to fall into many others. But Dante is awfully right here also. It is true that no man is ever contented with a single sin; yet "it is always one sin, and that the favorite one, which destroys souls. That conquered, all others fall with it; that victorious, all others follow it."

The lust and anger of the flesh do not of necessity or finally destroy; but when they become the lust and anger of the heart, "these," says Mr. Ruskin, "are the furies of Phlegethon, wholly ruinous. Lord of these, on the shattered rocks lies couched the infamy of Crete. For when the heart as well as the flesh kindles to its wrath, the whole man is corrupted, and his heart's blood is fed in its veins from the lake of fire."

Again, in all the forms which he invents for the imaginary physical punishment of Sin, Dante is pointing the lesson of 'Like to like,' the lesson that sin *is* punishment. "Wherewithal a man sinneth, by the same also shall he be punished." If the unchaste souls are swept round and round by a whirling storm, what is that storm but the unbridled passions of "those that lawless and incertain thoughts imagine, howling" ? If yet worse carnal offenders are baked by flames of fire, falling noiselessly upon them like an incessant snow, are not the desires of a corrupted heart thick with such slow-beating flames ? If his gluttons lie prostrate in the sludge, tormented by the dog-demon Cerberus, who is a sort of personified belly, what are gluttony, and the dehumanizing debasement of drunkenness, but the curse, "On thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life" ? If his hypocrites look like the monks of Co-

logne, with their huge hoods which display from afar their dazzling falsity, what is hypocrisy but such a crushing cloak of gilded lead? If his misers are plunged in a lake of boiling pitch, what is that filthy lake, which overflows its blighted banks, but the symbol of greed for money basely gained, selfishly spent, sordidly amassed? — for money which sticks to the fingers, and defiles the soul, and causes it to bubble up and down with excitement and depression, and the sighing of souls which it cannot satisfy? What is the frozen pool of Cocytus but the heart benumbed with cruel, cold-hearted, and treacherous selfishness? Are there no living men, who, in the very truth of things, are not more *doomed* to such places hereafter than they are in them now? Are not such places, in the light of the eternal verity, "*their own place*"? Is vice dead? Has it ceased to be grotesque and vile? Are there no living men — usurers, seducers,

traitors, furious, liars, slanderers, in high places and in low—whom a moralist as brave as Dante would, even in this day, doom to such retributions? Are any of us living in such places? Are our hands foul with that sticky pitch of greed? Are any of our tongues tipped with that envenomed fire? Have our hearts in them no sluice of hatred from the crimson ooze of Phlegethon? If so, let us learn from Dante that sin is no subject for jest and euphemism, no soft infirmity of the blood, but a rebellion against the Lord of our life. And if so, let us look to it, for evil is before us, and take to heart the words of Jesus, "Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish."

In the fifth Circle of Incontinence,—i.e., of sins which arise from the lack of self-control,—we meet those who suffer vengeance for the opposite extremes of wrath and gloomy sluggishness, of which the golden mean is just anger and right-

eous indignation. The wrathful are constantly rending each other to pieces in the filthy mud of Styx, the river of Hate; the gloomy are submerged wholly in its putrescent slime. These "gloomy-sluggish" souls are in Italian *accidiosi*; and *accidia* (the Greek ἀκηδία, the Latin *pigritia*, *desidia*) was once counted the eighth deadly sin. It is sloth; sullen irritation; sullen brooding over slight or fancied grievances; lack of noble anger; the weary sadness, which neither men delight nor women either. It is the express opposite of that virtuous energy, which, as Aristotle says, makes a man μακάριος, "blessed," if not εὐδαίμων, "prosperous."

We may better appreciate the sin and curse of sluggish gloom, of "a dark soul and foul thoughts," if we remember that "exultation" and "simplicity" were the distinctive characteristics of early Christianity.¹ The "Shepherd of Hermas," the

¹ Acts ii. 46, ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει καὶ ἀφελότητι.

"Pilgrim's Progress" of the second century, will show us what the early Christians thought of such faithless and neglectful gloom. "Unto God shall they all live," says Hermas, "who have cast out sadness from themselves, and arrayed themselves with all joy. Put sadness away from thee; for truly sadness is the sister of halfheartedness and bitterness. He that is sad doth always wickedly; first because he maketh sad the Holy Spirit, which has been given to man for joy; and secondly because he worketh lawlessness, neither praying to God nor giving Him thanks. Therefore cleanse thyself from this wicked sadness, and thou shalt live unto God." Is not this, then, a tremendous lesson against sluggish and selfish gloom in lives which ought to be bright with energy, and illumined even amid the darkness by faith in God? And have we noticed that St. Jude, in his Epistle, puts "murmurers and complainers" in the forefront of those

against whom he hurls his terrible invective?

Dante's views of the nature and results of repentance may best be seen in the two stories of a father and a son, — Guido, and Buonconte da Montefeltro. In the eighth circle of the Malebolge, or "Evil pits," he sees, swathed in a tongue of flame, Guido, who tells him that, after the life of a warrior, he thought to make amends by putting on the cord-girdle of a Franciscan like those deluded hypocrites who, in the "Paradise Lost,"

"Dying put on the weeds of Dominic,
Or in Franciscan think to pass disguised."

But while he is in his monastery, the Pope Boniface VIII. comes to him, and promises him full absolution for whatever counsel he may give, if he will only tell the Pope how to capture Penestrina. Relying on this papal absolution, Guido tells the Pope that he may take the city by "long

promises and small performance." Shortly afterwards he dies, and St. Francis comes to claim his monk. But at the same moment appears one of the "Black Cherubim," and says, "Wrong me not! he must come down among my menials. Ever since he gave that fraudulent counsel, I have had him by the hair. For a man who does not repent cannot be absolved; and it is not possible to repent beforehand of a sin you *mean* to commit." "O wretched me!" exclaimed Guido, "how I started when this devil seized me, and said, 'Perhaps thou didst not think that I was a logician!'"

Now, in the "Purgatory" we meet Guido's son, Buonconte, who had been killed in 1289 at the battle of Campaldino. He too, like his father, had lived a careless and evil life; and in flying from the rout, wounded in the throat, he fell in a pool of his own blood amid the reeds and mire of a marsh. But his last cry was a cry for pardon; and it was heard. An angel

of God came to take his soul at the same moment as a fiend of hell. Yet all that the fiend could say was, "O thou from Heaven! why dost thou rob me? Thou art carrying off his eternal part because of one wretched little tear, — *per una lagrimetta*, — that redeems him from me." If any think that "one wretched little tear" is a small price to pay for the difference between an eternity of blessedness and an eternity of anguish, we must remember that, in Dante's days, there was not believed to be the faintest gleam of any hope beyond the grave for those who died impenitent; but, also, that our souls have to do not with a relentless demon, but with a God of love; and that

"He who by penitence is not appeased
Is not of earth or heaven."

But further than this, we must bear in mind that repentance, being a process within the soul, cannot be measured by

the petty sequences of time. It belongs to that sphere of existence which may easily compress eternity into an hour, or stretch an hour into eternity. And Buonconte's story reminds us of that old English one of a careless liver, who, having been killed by a fall from his horse, reappeared to his friends to say,

"Between the saddle and the ground
I mercy sought, and mercy found."

Next, I would ask you to consider the awful and almost lurid light which Dante has flung on his own meaning in the thirty-third canto. There, in the lowest circle, frozen in the icy pool, the poets see a lost spirit, who entreats them to remove from his eyes the dreadful congealment, which, while permitting sight, increases torment by rendering tears impossible. Dante asks who he is, and finds that he is Friar Alberigo, who, with horrible treachery, has murdered his own guests at a banquet. But

Dante knows that Alberigo is alive, and asks with surprise how he comes to be here? He receives the fearful answer, that when souls have committed crimes so deadly as his, they instantly fall rushing down to that lowest pit, leaving their bodies upon earth. From that moment they are really dead. Their body, indeed, unknown to them, eats, drinks, sleeps, seems to live on earth. But their soul is not in it; it is but a mask of clay which a demon animates.

And he proceeds to mention others whom Dante has seen in Hell, who still *seem* to be alive on earth, having a name to live though they are dead; being the most awful kind of ghosts, — not souls without bodies, but bodies without souls. Is not the world full of such ghosts, — of those who “have a name to live while they are dead;” of men and women who living in pleasure are “dead while they live;” — not disembodied souls, but disensouled bodies, flitting about their living tombs of

selfishness and vice? The fourteenth century, we observe, had not learnt to legitimize vice by complacent doctrines. To Dante sin was not a thing to make a mock at. His Cerberus, and his horned demons, and his red-hot cities, and his boiling blood of Phlegethon, and his snow of scorching flames, are but the shadow and reflex of men's vices, crimes, and sins. And the doom of Friar Alberigo is a literal rendering of the verse, "They shall descend alive — go down quick — into the pit:" "Thou, O God, shalt cast them into the pit of destruction," and that "before they have lived out half their days."

Even these rapid views of some few of Dante's intended lessons in the first division of his poem will show you that it was the poet's object, in this mighty work, to set forth certain eternal truths for the purpose of the loftiest, most intense, and most vivid moral guidance. Only through realizing those truths, by the help of the grace

of God, can we attain to that ideal of character which the poet had set before him, — the lovely and lofty moral ideal of one who in boyhood is gentle, obedient, and modest; in youth, temperate, resolute, and loyal; in ripe years, prudent, just, and generous; and who in old age has attained to calm wisdom and perfect peace with God.

THE PURGATORIO.

Purgatory is described by Dante as “the place where the human soul is cleansed, and becomes worthy to ascend to heaven.” It is the antipodes of Hell, and the vestibule of Paradise. It represents the heart’s restoration to sanity, as contrasted with the horrors and agonies of wilful and willing sin. In the Purgatory we are —

“Saluted by the air
Of meek repentance, wafting wall-flower scents
From out the crumbling ruins of fallen pride;”

and all the spirits in it are "*contenti nel fuoco*" — happy even in the midst of the burning fiery furnace — because they are —

"Tending all

To the same point, attainable by all ;

Peace in ourselves, and union with our God."

We here bid farewell to the hopeless terror of the Inferno, — its indecent fiends ; its stench and sludge ; its Stygian marshes and cataracts of blood, and tettering leprosies, and cruelly congealing ice ; and we watch the souls submitted to the moral agencies which are remedies for sin. The poem is intensely human in its interest, and full of the hope and joy, transcending anguish, of those who can cry, "When I awake, I am present with Thee."

The chief consequences of grave wrongdoing are three : (1) the debt of just penalty ; (2) the evil inclination of the will ; and (3) the perverted instincts of the body and of the mind.¹ The

¹ See Perez, "Sette Cerchi del Purgatorio."

poem, in its whole inner meaning, does not bear only on penalties after death, but on the means whereby good habits may be substituted for evil habits in this life. Purgatorial pain is necessary for the satisfaction of the debt, for the rectification of the will, and for the strengthening of the misdirected bodily and mental powers, which still do what they hate. Purgatory is "a penitentiary with seven hospitals" for every soul whose sins are capable of cure. It is less a place of *punishment* than of *perfectionment*, intended to cleanse, to rebeautify, to disinfect, the guilty heart. The lowest terraces are devoted to the purification of the three passions of the mind which are the most deadly, and which lead to all other sins—Pride, Envy, and Anger. The middle terrace furnishes the punishment for *Accidia*, the moral sloth and spiritual torpor which result from the first three sins, and lead to the next three. The last three terraces

are for the punishment and cure of the least deadly and destroying of the seven deadly sins, — the sensual and earthly, as distinct from the demonic sins, — Avarice, Gluttony, and Uncleaness. The first three sins — Pride, Envy, and Anger — are the *opposite* of love; the midmost sin, Torpor, is the *absence* of love; the last three sins — Avarice, Gluttony, Sensuality — are the *excess* of perverted love. As we shall see, there are, on each of the seven terraces of Purgatory, (1) the analogous, inevitable, retributive, self-inflicted punishments; (2) the *sferze* and *freni*, or the goads supplied by good examples and the curbs supplied by bad examples; (3) the appropriate prayer; and (4) the beautiful, liberating, attendant Angel.

Now, if I were writing four or five papers on the Purgatorio instead of one, I could show how it abounds in thrilling incidents, and in lessons full of the noblest moral insight and the deepest spiritual

wisdom. As it is, I must be content to give a general sketch of the poem as a whole.

No sooner had Dante and Virgil struggled out of the abyss where impenitent sin is punished, to the foot of the mountain where sin is purged, than the whole atmosphere of the poem changes. We have left beneath our feet utterly, and forever, the horror and the infamy, the silent burning tombs, the brutal monsters, the noisome gloom where the spirits rage in their slimy marsh, the dolorous and harpy-haunted wood of the suicides, the stifling mephitic region of the Furies and of Medusa, where even an Angel's sweetness seems changed into anger and disdainfulness, and where no lip ventures to utter the Redeemer's name. No sooner have Dante and Virgil reached the upper light, than "the sweet hue of the Eastern sapphire, deepened to the far horizon in the pure serenity of air," bathes the aching vision, and gladdens the disgusted

heart. Overhead shine the four stars of the four cardinal virtues, Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude, and the Easter Day of the year of jubilee begins to dawn. They have reached the Ante-Purgatory; and Cato, the stern guardian of the place, — the type of Stoic virtue and self-discipline, — bids Virgil go and gird Dante with a smooth rush, — for in the Inferno he has dropped his monastic girdle into the abyss of fraud, — and to bathe his face, all stained by the mirk of the abyss, which it is not fit for Angels to look upon. The mountain-island of Purgatory is placed in the Western Hemisphere of water; and on its marge nothing grows but rushes, because they alone can live in the beating of the restless surge. The poets hasten towards the shore; and in a shady place, whence first they catch sight of the tremulous shimmer of the sea, Virgil places his hands on the ground, and bathes in dew the tear-stained cheeks which Dante offers him, discolored

as they are by the foul air of hell. "The dew of thy birth is of the womb of the morning." Then he plucks a smooth rush, and girds him with it; and, where he plucked up the humble plant, another is instantly reborn. You will doubtless see the poet's meaning. Rushes, and no other plant, will grow on the oozy shore, because they are the emblem of humility. St. Peter said to his converts, *τὴν ταπεινοφροσύνην ἐγκομβώσασθε*, "Tie humility around you with knots, like a slave's apron;"¹ and Dante, before he can climb the mountain of cleansing, must be clothed and girded with humility, the virtue which he needed most. Rushes bend to the beating wave, and so are not broken or destroyed, just as the wearied soul when it meekly submits to God's chastisements, finds them to be for healing. And when the rush is plucked, another springs up in its place, because the means of grace are not wasted in the using. The lesson is for all

¹ 1 Pet. v. 5.

time, and for life as well as for death. He who would enter the realm of penitence must be girded with meekness, and his face must be washed in the pure dew of heaven, gathered in the shady places of godly sorrow.

Then, over the sea, in the morning dawn, a gleam approaches them, swift as the flight of birds, and ever growing brighter, till they recognize the white wings of an Angel, as he stands high on the stern of a light shallop. He needs neither oar nor sail; but the boat speeds forward by the waving of his eternal plumes, and in it are more than a hundred spirits, singing the Psalm, "When Israel came out of Egypt." The Angel, whose look seems inscribed with happiness, blesses the spirits with the sign of the Cross, as they leap ashore, and then speeds swiftly away. Dante recognizes one of the newly arrived souls as his friend, the musician Casella; and at his request Casella sings Dante's song, "O love which dost

hold converse in my mind." He sings with such sweetness that all the spirits stop to listen, till the guardian of the place scatters them as a flock of feeding doves are scattered, by sternly bidding them remember that there must be no slothful loitering till they have cast off the covering which veils their souls from God. They hasten onwards, and the pure and noble conscience of Virgil seems to be troubled and remorseful for that slight fault. It is one of the many reminders which we receive throughout the "Purgatorio," that not even innocent things must keep us back from the steep path through penitence to heaven. We must forget those things that are behind; even the innocent doves must be taken from the Temple.

" Man must pass
From what once seemed good, to what now proves
best."

Speeding on, they are directed by some spirits to an aperture through which they

must climb. It is so small and mean-looking that Dante has often seen a vine-dresser fill up a larger gap with a forkful of briers when the grapes begin to purple. Passing that strait and narrow entrance, they find the climb up the craggy mountain-side so steep and hard that to Dante it seems more rugged than the steepest passes of the Apennines, which had become familiar to his exiled feet. But here a man needs not only the hands and feet of effort; he must fly—fly on the swift wings and plumes of burning desire, guided by faith and illuminating hope; though, even then, he will need all the toil of heart and knees and hands, to scale those toppling crags. And sometimes Dante cries to Virgil almost in despair, but he is told that he must not fall back till they reach a resting-place. And when he is discouraged by the thought that the summit of the mountain rises far out of sight, yet—for repentance grows ever easier by effort—Virgil tells him that,

the higher men climb, the less does the ascent hurt them, till at last it becomes, not easy alone, but pleasant and spontaneous.

When the poets reach a resting-place they learn that they are still in the Ante-Purgatory. For, as there is an Ante-hell for the souls of the sluggishly selfish, so there is an Ante-purgatory for the souls of those who have not repented till the hour of death, but have even then found the great arms of the Infinite Goodness spread wide open to receive them. These souls chant the *Miserere* as they go; and among these Dante converses with the excommunicated King Manfred of Naples, and with Buonconte of Montefeltro. But meanwhile they must pause. The night is coming on. No upward step can ever be taken after the sunset. "The night cometh, when no man can work." Let us note, in passing, that the Ante-purgatory, like the Ante-hell, is *crowded* with spirits; for are not selfishness

and worldly aims all but universal among mankind? And, even if our souls have grace to struggle an inch or two above these, are we not all tempted to moral indolence and spiritual sloth?

But since the twilight is falling, they are led by the spirit of the poet-patriot Sordello to a lovely dell, enamelled with flowers of all hues, and balmy with fragrance indescribable, where they see the spirits of many of the noble dead; and among them we are pleased to find our own King Henry III., "the king of simple life," the builder of Westminster Abbey. These spirits, through the cares of sovereignty, have been too tardy in repentance. Under the light of three stars — the three theological virtues, the stars of Faith and Hope and Charity — they are singing the old mediæval compline hymn —

*"Te lucis ante terminum
Rerum Creator poscimus
Ut pro tua clementia
Sis Praesul et custodia."*

“Thee, ere the closing of the day,
Creator of the world we pray,
We pray Thee of Thy clemency
Our guardian and our Lord to be.”

Two Angels, armed with swords which are of flame, but short and with no points, descend, and stand on the hill on either side. Green were their plumes as the freshborn leaflets of spring; and green—the radiant color of hope—were the robes fluttered by the beating of their wings; and their fair golden heads were visible, though their faces dazzled the sight. And when down the unguarded end of the valley a huge serpent, the one which gave Eve that bitter food, comes creeping through the grass and flowers, slyly and self-complacently, turning its head and ever sleeking its glittering scales,—down swept from the opposite heights those two heavenly falcons; and, hearing their green wings cleave the air, the serpent fled, and the angels wheeled upward to resume their guard. Exquisite

allegory! The dell, all flowers and fragrance, represents the resting-places of the soul which has felt the stirrings of repentance and the certain hope of forgiveness. The starry lights of the virtues shine upon it. It breathes of celestial song and gladness. The temptations of sin, sleek and subtle and glozing, ever creep serpent-like to surprise its denizens; but the Angels of hope keep watch over it, the hue of whose robes and radiant wings is that of the rainbow round about the throne in sight like unto an emerald. It is the land of Beulah in the "Pilgrim's Progress;" but the poet implies the deeply necessary caution that the soul, even when it has repented, has still need to watch and pray.

Just before the dawn, Santa Lucia, type of God's illuminating grace, bears Dante upwards, as on an "eagle's golden pinions," to the ramparts of Purgatory. Then follows an allegory no less clear and beautiful. The poets reach a gate, which looks like

a mere crack cleft in the wall, approached by three steps. The first is of white marbles, so smooth and polished that it reflects the exact appearance of him who gazes on it. The second is of dark, inky purple, rugged and burnt, and cracked lengthwise and across. The third, which masses itself above, is of porphyry, flaming as the blood which leaps from an artery. On the threshold of diamond above this step, sits an Angel, clad in ashen-colored garments, who holds a key of silver and of gold. Learning that they had come thither by the grace of heaven, the angel raises Dante,—who has smitten on his breast and fallen prostrate at his feet,—and with the point of his sword marks the letter P seven times upon his forehead. “See,” he said, “that, when thou art within, thou wash off these strokes.” Then, telling them that to those who lie prostrate there he is bidden to lean to mercy, rather than to justice, he pushes open the sacred door, warning them that he

who looks back must at once return, as not being worthy of the kingdom of heaven. The meaning of the allegory is plain. The narrow cleft in the rock is the door of penitence, — the needle's eye, — which, looked on from afar, seems much narrower to the repentant sinner than when he has really faced it. It can only be approached by three steps, — the white step of sincerity, which mirrors as he is the man who stands on it; the dark, rough, cross-splintered step of contrition; the flaming porphyry step of self-devotion, of love to God and man.

Only by candor, by sorrow, by love, can the sinner set his feet on the diamond threshold of his Redeemer's merits; and to such alone can the Angel of absolution, in his sad-colored robe, with his golden key of authority, and his silver key of holy discernment, open that steep path where he who hath once put his hand to the plough must not look back again. The seven P's on the forehead are the *peccata*, the seven deadly

sins, of which every mark must be effaced from any brow which can ever be uplifted to the light of God.

They have now passed out of the Ante-Purgatory, and reached the lowest of the seven terraces, which, connected with each other by flights of steps, run round the mountain of Purgatory proper. Each terrace is devoted to the punishment of one of the deadly sins. But since all sins are inextricably linked together, *every* soul must pass through all the seven remedial penalties.

This lowest terrace, where the sin of Pride is punished, and where they hear the spirits singing, "We praise Thee, O God," is of white marble, exquisitely carved with sculptures, representing scenes of pride by way of warning, and of humility by way of encouragement. Dante realized the power of sacred teaching by means of art. The spirits, which there undergo the blessedness of healing punishment, are bowed to

the earth with weights, under which, now retributively humbled, they crawl stooping along, reminding Dante of the corbels in a Gothic building, which have the knees bent painfully to the breast, "For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased."

As they creep along, they chant the Lord's Prayer, only saying that the clause, "Lead us not into temptation," is for their brethren upon earth, since they themselves, through the grace of God, can have no temptations more. At the end of the terrace an Angel meets them. He is a fair creature, clad in white, and in his face a quivering beam, as of the morning star. Opening his arms and wings, he bids them ascend. With one brush of his heavenly plumes upon Dante's forehead, he erases the first of the seven P's; while, finding his weight indefinitely lightened by that remission of pride, to the sound of the chant, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit,*" Dante mounts to the second terrace, where souls expiate the sin of Envy.

It is formed of colored rock of the livid hue of their besetting sin; and there, with their eyelids sewn together with an iron wire—blinded as once they had been self-blinded by vice—leaning their backs upon the rocks, and clad in teasing cloth of hair, the spirits, once sinful, but now sure of ultimate forgiveness, rue the evil eye, the dulness, and the irritability of the mortal sin of Envy. These helpless, squalid, self-blinded souls, with whom what was once inward has become outward, know now that they were wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. Voices in the air recall to them the examples of the sin and of its punishment. A splendid Angel shows the poets the next stair; and to the song, "*Blessed are the merciful*," they climb to the third terrace.

There, in a dense, bitter, blinding fog,—so dense that Dante can only move through it by leaning on Virgil's shoulder,—is punished the sin of Anger, where the spirits,

their eyes dim because of sorrow, are singing the *Agnus Dei*, and where Dante sees a warning vision of wrath and of its punishment. Then the Angel of peace, singing "*Blessed are the peacemakers*," gleams through the smoke, and obliterates the third P from Dante's brow.

On the fourth terrace, hurrying round and round in incessant haste, while they warn each other of the blessing of promptitude, and the sin of neglect, the souls of men who have done the work of God negligently expiate the sin of Sloth; and there, before he reaches the three last terraces, where worldly and carnal sins are punished, Dante has a dream of the bewitching Siren of sensual temptation, shown in her true loathliness by the grace of heaven. Then an Angel with swan-like wings brushes off another of the fatal letters, sweetly singing to them, "*Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted*."

In the fifth circle the spirits of the Ava-

ricious, who had been "breast-buried in the rubbish of the world," lie prostrate, weeping on the earth; and here the soul of Pope Hadrian V. tells Dante that he had sinned by avarice till he became Pope of Rome, and, crushed by that office, and discovering his full misery and vanity of life, he had repented. Soon afterwards the poets hear a sudden outburst of "*Glory to God in the highest,*" and feel the whole mountain tremble; they learn that this always happens from the sympathy of every one of these forgiven souls, when any one of them, ending his expiation, is suffered to mount upwards to Paradise. For when the will that accepts punishments culminates in the will that seeks freedom, God says of the soul, "*Loose him and let him go.*" The joy is for the soul of the poet Statius.

On the sixth terrace the Gluttons and Drunkards are punished by emaciation, with perpetual thirst and hunger. When they

reach the stair at the end of the terrace, an Angel, glorious as metal in the furnace, obliterates the last but one of the seven fatal P's, by touching Dante on the forehead with plumes which breathe ambrosial fragrance, like the May breeze blown over grass and flowers at dawn, and "sated with the innumerable rose." In the seventh and last circle, sensual sinners expiate their carnal wickedness in burning flames. They walk as it were in the light of their own fire, and in the sparks which they have kindled. Outside the flame stands an Angel, singing in voice sweeter than mortal, "*Blessed are the pure in heart.*" He tells Dante that he, and that every soul which would enter heaven, must pass through that purifying flame; for "if any man's work shall be burned he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire."

The mandate strikes into the soul of Dante a deathlike horror. He remembers that he has seen the horrid spectacle of human be-

ings burnt alive; and scarcely, by assuring him that the torment *cannot* end in death, and that, beyond the fire, he will see the glorified form of Beatrice, does Virgil persuade his tardy conscience to plunge into the willing agony. It must be so, for "God is like a refiner's fire;" yet, "when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned." He enters the healing flame, guided by a sweet voice which sang, "*Come, ye blessed of My Father;*" but "when I was within," said Dante, "I would have flung myself into molten glass to cool me, so immeasurable was the burning there."

But he passes through it safely, and now the soul is near the end of its long course of painful penitence. The soul of Dante, in its holy longing, feels as if it were winged for flight. They are on an odorous soil, under the leaves of a forest resonant with the song of birds, and tremulous with a soft breeze which plays upon

their foreheads. Through the wood, amid May blossoms, flows a stream of purest crystal; and on the other side of it, singing and gathering flowers, is a lovely lady, Matilda, type of the active life which delights in the works of God. Already Virgil has said to Dante that he can guide him no farther. "The temporal fire, and the eternal, hast thou seen, my son, and hast come to a part where I myself can discern no farther. Thou hast come forth from the steep and narrow ways; henceforth take thine own will for thy guide. See there the sun which gleams upon thy brow; see the tender grass, the flowers, and the shrubs which the soil of this land produces for itself. Free, true, and sound is now thy judgment; expect no further word or sign from me. Therefore, over thyself, I crown and I mitre thee."

The stream on whose bank they stand is called Lethe, and, at another part, Eunoe. Innocence and virtue become the restored

heritage of the new and childlike man. The water of Lethe chases from the mind the memory of sin; the water of Eunoe recalls every good deed to mind. When Matilda has told them this, she sings as in rapture, "*Blessed are they whose sins are covered.*"

A gleam flashes through the forest, a sweet melody runs through the glowing air, and they see a glorious vision of the symbols of Christ and the Church, and the elders and apostles, and among them, amid a cloud of flowers shed by the hands of angels, a Lady whose white veil is crowned with olive. The blood of Dante thrills as he recognizes Beatrice, now the personification of Heavenly Wisdom, but at the same time the sweet lady of his love. He turns for sympathy to Virgil, but Virgil has vanished. In those regions human knowledge can help no more. And as he begins to weep that he has lost his guide and friend, Beatrice says to him, "Dante, weep not yet that Virgil leaves

thee; weep not yet, for thou must weep soon another wound;" and then, towering over him in imperious attitude, like a mother over a son that is in fault, she asks him how he could have dared to approach this mountain—he who has fallen from his boyish purity and innocence into intellectual aberrations, if not into carnal sin and folly? So sternly does she speak to him, as his head is bowed in shame, that the angels suddenly begin the plaintive strain, "*In Thee, O Lord, has been my hope,*" as though indirectly they were pleading for him with the beautiful stern monitress. At their tenderness his heart, which has been benumbed with anguish, breaks like melting ice into sighs and tears.

Broken down with utter remorse and agony at the continued strain of her lofty reproaches, standing like a boy ashamed of guilt, mutely listening with his eyes upon the ground, and at last bidden to raise his face, he falls down in a swoon. Then Ma-

tilda plunges him in the waters of forgetfulness, and he hears the angels sing, "*Thou shalt wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.*" The four virtues — Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude — receive him. He is bidden to gaze on Beatrice, and sees the light of Christ reflected in her eyes. Then he is suffered to drink the waters of Eunoe, which are sweeter than words can tell; and refreshed, like young plants which are reclad by spring with tender leaves, he issues from the holy wave, pure, and ready to mount up to the stars.

Such, in merest outline, is this noble poem, which, in all its elements,—many of which I necessarily omit,—is one of the noblest ever written. Let me touch, in conclusion, on one or two of its most instructive features.

1. Notice, first, the intense importance which the souls in Purgatory attach to the prayers of their relatives on earth. "Pray

for me," all the spirits ask. "Tell my Giovanna, my innocent little daughter Giovanna, to pray for me," says Nino; "I think her mother loves me no more." "Reveal to my sweet Costanza that thou hast seen me here," says King Manfred; "for the prayers of the other world avail much here." "The tears of my Nella, my little Nella whom I loved so much, have brought me here so soon," says Forese. "Neither my wife Giovanna, nor any one else, cares for me, therefore I go among the rest with downcast looks," says Buconte of Montefeltro. But you will say, and rightly, that the Church of England gives no sanction to—though she does not inhibit—prayers for the dead. The dead have passed to the mercy of the Merciful, and He, without the prayers which He has not told us to offer, will deal with them in His mercy. But remember always, in reading Dante, that you are not only reading of Hell, and Purgatory, and Heaven hereafter, but also

of vice, repentance, holiness now. And can anything help us more in the contrition of a penitent life, than to feel our solidarity with the communion of saints, and to know that intensity of love prevails against length of time, and that we can be helped by the prayers of those who love us? "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

"And thou," says King Arthur to Sir Bedivere, —

"If thou should'st never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by
prayer

Than this world dreams of. Therefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.

For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

2. There is another great lesson which the "Purgatorio" will teach us. It is that

forgiveness of sins is a very different thing from remission of consequences. Esau repents, but he has lost the blessing. Achan repents, but he has to die by fire in the valley of Achor. David repents, but thenceforth the dark spirits of lust and blood are walking in his house. The impure man repents; but his bones are still full of the sin of his youth, which shall die down with him in the dust. The prodigal repents; but nevertheless his root has been as rottenness, and his blossom has gone up as dust. The "Purgatorio" will help to teach us that sin is far more to be dreaded than punishment.

There is a deep lesson here. It is the lesson that —

"Hearts which verily repent
Are burdened with impunity,
And comforted by chastisement:
That punishment's the best to bear
Which follows soonest on the sin;
And guilt's a game where losers fare
Better than those who seem to win."

3. Once more there is the lesson, how pressing is the need for repentance. Men delay repentance; and yet, for the soul that has fallen into sin, repentance is the very work of life. With awful folly they pave hell with good resolutions which they do not fulfil, and bid God await their leisure. How different is it when a soul has realized the awful importance of time! In Dante's "Purgatorio," the one thought, the one aim, the one desire, is, with all speed, to get rid of the sin that has been the shame and curse of life. The spirits on the terrace of sloth will not stop, even for a moment, in their race. Pope Adrian, weeping for his avarice, bids Dante leave him, that his tears may not be interrupted. They are all free; but their *will* to suffer proves their worthiness, for, by the ordinance of heaven, they are as eager for the torment as once they were for sin. When a soul is in earnest, it has not time to waste on anything which does not further its own duty and its own redemption.

Here, then, are a few of the many lessons of the poem in which Dante draws the picture of men suffering, in calm and holy hope, the sharp discipline of repentance, amid the prayers, the melodies, the consoling images and thoughts of the Christian life. "It was one and the same man who arose from the despair, the agony, the vivid and vulgar horrors of the *Inferno*, to the sense of sure salvation, sinlessness, and joy ineffable. No man ever measured the greatness of man, in all its forms, with so true and yet so admiring an eye, and with such glowing hope, as he who has also portrayed so awfully man's littleness and vileness.

He never lets go the recollection that human life, if it grovels at one end in corruption and sin, and has to struggle through the sweat and dust and disfigurement of earthly toil, has throughout compensations, remedies, spheres innumerable of profitable activity, sources inexhaustible of delight and consolation; and, at the other end, a

perfection which cannot be named. And he went farther: no one who could understand and do homage to greatness in man ever drew the line so strongly between greatness and goodness, and so unhesitatingly placed the hero of this world only — placed him in all his magnificence, and honored with no timid or dissembling reverence — at the distance of worlds below the place of the lowest saint."

THE PARADISO.

The "Paradiso" of Dante never has been, or can be, so popular with the mass of readers as the "Inferno" or the "Purgatorio." It has not the weird and thrilling interest and variety of the "Inferno," with its multitudes of contemporary references. It has not the human nearness of the "Purgatorio." What sin is, we all know; what penitence is, we all know, or may know; what is the nature of the unbroken beatitude of glo-

rified spirits, we can only dream. We cannot even distantly realize — we can only shadow forth in the language of dim metaphor — the conditions of eternal bliss. It is quite natural to exclaim —

“Oh for a deeper insight into Heaven !
More knowledge of the glory and the joy
Which there unto the happy souls is given ;
Their intercourse, their worship, their employ !
For it is past belief that Christ hath died
Only that we unending Psalms may sing ;
That all the gain Death's awful curtain hides
Is this eternity of antheming ;
And this praised rest — are we to sit forever
Without more strife, or subject of endeavor ?
Alas ! too oft with thoughts of earth or hell
We make our heaven less conceivable.”

In Dante's Paradise no possibility seems left for earthly analogies, except such as are derived from the two least carnal senses, those of sight and hearing. Hence the Paradisiacal sources of joy are all derived either from light or melody. Of both these sources of delight there was an abun-

dance in the "Purgatorio," though in the "Inferno" there were only horrible miasma, lurid gleams, and sounds of horror and fearfulness; but in the "Paradiso" even the glory and the music are bathed in a more ethereal, or rather immaterial, atmosphere.

The heaven of Dante is a universe of light. His poem begins with the words,—

"The glory of Him who moves all things penetrates through the Universe, and shines forth in one quarter more, and less in another. In the heaven which receives most of His light was I."

What he saw, he says, surpasses utterance.

"Natheless all,
That in my thoughts I of that sacred realm
Could store, shall now be subject of my song."

Light is the most essential characteristic of the poem. Everywhere there is light,—in every circle of the planetary and the starry and the crystalline heavens; and in the Empyrean, and in the mystical White

Rose, and in the Ladder of God whose summit is invisible, and in the River of Life flaming with splendor, between two banks bright with flowers; and in the central point of light itself, so intense that no eye can gaze on it, so minute that the smallest star in the firmament would seem a moon beside it. The very regions through which he passes are like eternal pearls; and he and Beatrice glide through them as rays of light enter transparent water, lucid and white as sunstruck diamonds. And in this brimming flood of light move the beatified saints in melody and glory, circling round Dante in vivid garlands of eternal roses, or swathed in environments of ambient radiance, shooting from place to place, like fires in alabaster — happy fires, living topazes, living rubies, flaming in ethereal sunshine — multitudes of splendors flitting through the crystal gleam like birds! And even after these unimaginable “varieties of light, and combinations of stars and rays, and jewelled

reflections," there are fresh throngs of splendors — cressets and crowns and circles — singing round the Virgin in ineffable, indescribable glories, in blinding and bewildering brilliancies. And the inmost Paradise is one great White Rose; and its yellow centre is the central light whose circumference would outgird the sun; and its petals upon petals are innumerable ranks of spotless spirits, all gazing upon the Light of Light; and as bees flit among flowers, so fluttering about the petals of the Eternal Rose — "their wings of gold, their robes white as snow, their faces radiant as pure flame" — enjoying and enjoyed, the multitudes of the Angels deposit in the recesses of those happy petals the peace and glow brought down from the bosom of God Himself.

The heavens also ring with perpetual music, angelic, archangelic, the music of the spheres, and the hymns of holy spirits

"That sing, and singing in their glory move."

Music is undoubtedly the one earthly science which seems to open widest to our imagination the doors of heaven,

“On golden hinges moving.”

We may quote the celebrated words of Newman: “By musical sounds great unknown wonders seem to be typified. There are but seven notes in the scale: make them fourteen, yet what slender outfit for so vast an enterprise! What science brings so much out of so little? Out of what poor elements does some great master in it create his new world! Shall we say that all his exuberant inventiveness is mere ingenuity? a trick of art—without reality, without meaning? Is it possible that the inexhaustible evolution and disposition of notes, so rich yet so simple, so intricate yet so regular, so various yet so majestic, should be a mere sound which is gone and perishes? Can it be that those mysterious stirrings of the heart, and keen emotions,

and strange yearnings after we know not what, and awful impressions from we know not whence, should be wrought in us by what is unsubstantial, and comes and goes, and begins and ends in itself? It is not so. It cannot be! No, they have escaped from some higher sphere; they are the out-pourings of eternal harmony in the medium of created sound; they are echoes from our home; they are the voice of Angels, or the Magnificat of saints, or the living laws of the divine governance. Something they are besides themselves, which we cannot compass, which we cannot utter, though mortal man, and he perhaps not otherwise distinguished among his fellows, has the art of eliciting them."

And in this respect our own Milton, himself a musician, felt exactly as Dante did, as he shows, not only in "Paradise Lost," but throughout his poems. These lines are quite in the spirit of his mighty predecessor:—

“Blest pair of sirens, pledges of heaven’s joy,
Sphere-born harmonious sisters, Voice and Verse,
Wed your divine sounds, and mixed powers employ,
And to our high-raised phantasy present
That undisturbed song of pure concent,
Aye sung before the sapphire-colored throne
To him who sits thereon,
With saintly shout and solemn jubilee;
Where the bright Seraphim in burning row
Their loud uplifted angel-trumpets blow,
And the cherubic host in thousands quires
Touch their immortal harps of golden wires,
With those just spirits that wear victorious palms,
Hymns devout and holy psalms
Singing everlastingly.”

Looking at the Paradise more in detail, we must first say a word on Dante’s system of the universe. It was a strange one, and only has an historic interest, being of course wholly prescientific. To him the solar system was not heliocentric, but geocentric; i.e., the sun was not its centre, but the earth. The earth is surrounded by the two spheres of air and fire, through which the Mount of Purgatory ascends. Beyond the terrestrial Paradise, at the sum-

mit of the Mount, are the nine heavens of the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the fixed stars, and the *Primum Mobile*, or crystalline heaven. These sweep round the spheres of air and fire in circular and concentric orbits. These orbits increase in size, and the heavens in swiftness of motion, the farther they are from earth and the nearer to God. Beyond them is the tenth heaven—the all-containing, uncontained, timeless, spaceless, motionless, boundless Empyrean. Here is the “Rose of Paradise,” wherein dwell eternally the saints of God; and at the centre of this rose is “an effulgent lake, formed by the reflection of the uncreated light. This rose is the convex summit of the *Primum Mobile*, and it is so placed that a line drawn from its centre to our globe would touch the earthly Jerusalem.” At the centre of this effulgence, manifested as one intensely luminous point, is the Divine Essence. Round this atomic

point of burning brilliancy, circle the nine orders of Angels, divided into three Hierarchies. First and nearest are the Hierarchies of Seraphim, Cherubim, and Thrones; next the Dominations, Virtues, and Powers; then the Principalities, Archangels, and Angels. These Hierarchies are first set forth in the ancient work ascribed to Dionysius the Areopagite; and you will remember in "Paradise Lost" the lines, —

"Hear, all ye angels, progeny of light,
Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers!"

Dante was permeated with the conception that "God is Light." And here again we note how much the ideas of Milton resemble those of Dante, when he sings:—

"Hail, holy Light, offspring of Heaven first-born,
Or of the Eternal coeternal beam!
May I express thee unblamed? Since God is light,
And never but in unapproached light
Dwelt from eternity: dwelt then in thee,
Bright effluence of bright essence uncreate.

Or hearest thou rather, pure ethereal stream,
Whose fountain who shall tell? Before the sun,
Before the heavens thou wert."

Into this region, where there is neither space nor time, but only Light, Dante is led by Beatrice. Her eyes are fixed on the eternally revolving circles of the inmost heaven; his eyes are fixed on her. For Beatrice now stands as a symbol of Divine Science; and her eyes, as Dante explains in the "Convito," are the demonstrations of Truth, as her smiles are its persuasions, "in which is shown forth the interior light of wisdom under some veil." And in the demonstrations and persuasions of Wisdom is felt the highest pleasure of that Beatitude which is the greatest good in Paradise.

The great Rose of Paradise is divided horizontally and vertically. Below the horizontal division are the billions of those who have died innocent as infants and children. At the left of the vertical di-

vision are the Old Testament saints, who died before the coming of Christ, yet looked forward to it in hope. Their seats are all full. At the right are the saints of the gospel dispensation, whose seats are only partly full. This reminds us of the famous statue of Christ on the west front of Amiens Cathedral, known as the *Beau Dieu d'Amiens*. At the left are the saints and patriarchs of the ancient dispensation, looking towards their Promised Redeemer with faces full of ardent hope. At the right are the apostles and saints of the Gospel, looking at Him with faces bright with the rapture of glorious fruition.

The nine Heavens are assigned to different orders of saints. The first, revolved by Angels, is the circle of the Moon; and as the Moon waxes and wanes, this is the circle assigned to those nuns whose vows have failed of perfect fulfilment from a deficiency of will.

The second circle, revolved by Archan-

gels, is that of Mercury, which is less lighted by the sun than other stars, and is therefore assigned to wills imperfect through love of earthly fame.

The third heaven is revolved by the Principalities, and is that of Venus, the last star to which earth's shadow reaches. It is assigned to souls imperfect through excess of human love.

The fourth heaven, revolved by the Powers, is that of the sun, where dwelt the great spiritual lights, the teachers of divinity and philosophy.

The fifth, revolved by Virtues, is that of Mars, the red star; and here dwelt the souls of the martyrs, confessors, and holy warriors.

The sixth, revolved by Dominions, is that of the white star Jupiter, where live the rulers famous for justice.

The seventh — the last planetary heaven — is the cold orbit of Saturn, where dwell the contemplative and abstinent hermits and monks.

The starry heavens — the heavens of the fixed stars — are revolved by the Cherubim. To this sphere descends the triumph of Christ, and here dwell the apostles and saints of the Old and New Testaments.

The ninth, starless, crystalline heaven, revolved by the Seraphim, is the *Primum Mobile*, the source of all motion, the heaven of essential light and love : and here the nine orders of the celestial hierarchy wheel in fiery rings around the Light, which no man can approach unto. Here, in the mystical White Rose, dwell the very elect. It is the heaven of Intuition — the heaven of Angels and Saints, who gaze forever on the Trinity in Unity and the Incarnate Word. And here “in supereminence of beatific vision progressing the dateless and irrevoluble circle of eternity, they clasp inseparable hands in joy and bliss in over-measure for ever.”

Before he plunges into this region of divine, eternal, and dazzling abstractions,

Dante seems to have felt how few minds were qualified, or would care, to follow him. He says at the beginning of the second canto, —

“All ye who, in small bark, have following sailed
Eager to listen on the adventurous track
Of my proud keel, that singing cuts her way,
Backward return with speed, and your own shores
Revisit, nor put out to open sea,
Where, losing me, perchance ye may remain
Bewildered in deep maze. The way I pass
Ne'er yet was run.

Exactly in the same spirit Milton prays, —

‘Still govern thou my song,
Urania, and fit audience find, though few.’

After leaving the Mount of Purgatory, Dante has risen, — by the sort of counter-gravitation of spirituality, — with Beatrice, into what seemed like a lucid, close, solid and shining cloud, a sort of eternal pearl, into which he entered as a ray of light enters the water. It is the sphere of the

Moon; and here first the music of the spheres burst upon his senses. He asks information about the spots on the face of the Moon, and in correction of his previous theories is told by Beatrice, not very lucidly, that they are the divers effects of the Divine Virtue infused into this first and farthest heaven by its Angelic movers. But the discussion is interrupted by the dim gleaming vision of many faces; and Dante, addressing the gleam that seemed most desirous to commune with him, finds that he is speaking to Piccarda, the sister of his wife Gemma Donati, and of Forese, and Corso. This is the lowest heaven, and Piccarda is only here because she had been a nun, but her brother Corso had compelled her to leave her convent, and marry Rossellino Della Tossa — a marriage which she only survived for a few months. He asks her whether the spirits in the lower spheres are conscious of any loss because they are not in a higher place, where

they may enjoy fuller vision. He receives this very beautiful and striking answer:—

“She, with those other spirits, gently smiled,
Then answer’d with such gladness, that she seem’d
With love’s first flame to glow: Brother! our will
Is in composure settled by the power
Of charity, which makes us will alone
What we possess, and nought beyond desire:
If we should wish to be exalted more
Then would our wishes clash with the high will
Of Him who sets us here.
And in this will is high tranquility;
It is the mighty ocean, whither tends
Whatever it creates and nature makes.”

And Dante adds,—

“Then saw I clearly how each spot in heaven
Is Paradise, though with like gracious dew
The supreme virtue shower not over all.”

Piccarda then shows him the spirit of the Empress Costanza, daughter of Roger, King of Sicily, whom her brother had forced from her convent to marry her to Henry VI., son of Frederic Barbarossa. Then she vanished like a body that sinks in water, singing

the *Ave Maria* as she disappeared. Perhaps what Piccarda said to him may remind us of Whittier's lines:—

“My God, my God, if thither led
By thy free grace unmerited,
No crown, or palm be mine, but let me keep
A heart that still can feel, and eyes that still
may weep.”

And of Kingslèy's prayer — not that he may receive any throne of glory, in that realm beyond the grave — but only that he may be thought worthy of being admitted into any distant place, were it even the humblest and farthest and lowest in God's kingdom.

The conversation had suggested to Dante some question about Plato's hypothesis of the return of disembodied spirits to the stars. Beatrice answers that, though the degree of blessedness *seems* to vary, since “one star differeth from another star in glory,” yet all the blessed, practically, have their seats in the highest heaven, and are not fixed in particular spheres. Then Dante

has another difficulty — “Why should souls suffer from a vow broken only through violence?” She answers that there are degrees of will, and that the absolute will cannot be overborne by force; — and that this *final* freedom of the will is the greatest of God’s gifts.

Then, as an arrow from a bow, they sped into the second heaven, the heaven of Mercury, inhabited by rulers who have been active in the pursuit of praise. Here the Emperor Justinian gives them his swift and nobly impressive sketch of what the Roman eagle has done from the days of Romulus to those of Charlemagne. Here, too, they meet with Romeo, who, after rendering splendid service to Raymond, Count of Berenger, and contriving the marriage of his four daughters to four kings, had been driven away by lying malice, and forced in his old age to beg his bread.

Beatrice then solves some doubts of Dante about the nature of Christ, and the ques-

tion of the Atonement, and they ascend insensibly to the third heaven, that of Venus, the heaven of holy love, where Dante converses with Charles Martel, son of Charles II. of Naples, a young prince whom at Florence Dante had known as a friend, but who had died at twenty-five. The prince explains to him the planetary influences, which, if unresisted, tend to modify character, and so may cause children to degenerate from their parents. There, too, he talks with Bishop Foulk of Toulouse, and with Cunizza, sister of Ezzelino. Into the mouth of Foulk, Dante puts one of his denunciations of the greedy and avaricious pastors of his day, who desert the Gospel for the "Decretals," and whose thoughts "went not to Nazareth where Gabriel opened his wings." But he prophesies — with reference to the removal of the popes to Avignon in 1309 — that Rome shall soon be free from their adultery.

They have now left the spheres of im-

perfect will, and mount to the fourth heaven, the heaven of the Sun, where dwell the spirits of wisdom and knowledge. Here they find a most interesting choir of theologians — Dionysius the Areopagite, supposed author of the book on the celestial hierarchies, which went by his name; Gratian, author of the “Decretals;” Boethius, the author of the celebrated “Consolations of Philosophy,” whom Theodoric the Goth executed; our own childlike and charming Venerable Bede; the saintly angelic doctor, Thomas Aquinas, one not only of the greatest doctors, but also of the sweetest saints of the Middle Ages; Albert the Great; and Peter Lombard, the famous Master of the Sentences. To these were afterwards added the Prophet Nathan, St. Chrysostom, our own St. Anselm, Hugo of St. Victor, St. Bonaventura, and the Abbot Joachim, who wrote on the Apocalypse, and was believed to have had the gift of prophecy. Dante evidently loves to

linger among those sweet and holy souls. St. Thomas Aquinas, though a Dominican, is so far from feeling the passionate jealousy which afterwards raged between his order and the Franciscans, that he pronounces a glowing eulogy on the humble St. Francis, who founded the Franciscans and made Poverty his bride; and he ends by bewailing the degeneracy of the Dominican order in his day. Not to be outdone in generosity, St. Bonaventura, the Seraphic doctor, follows St. Thomas, the Angelic doctor, and, having been a Franciscan, pronounces his eulogy on St. Dominic, the founder of the Dominicans. St. Thomas then renews the discourse, and speaks of the greatness of King Solomon, and of rash judgments. Solomon, at the prayer of Beatrice, solves some of Dante's doubts about the nature of the glorified bodies of the saints, which he explains as vestures of light radiated from the love of God.

They next ascend to the fifth heaven, of Mars, where they see a great vision of Christ on the cross, and the souls of warriors passing too and fro on it, uttering hymns of ineffable melody to the Conqueror of death. Here Dante is greeted by the spirit of his crusading ancestor Cacciaguida, who draws an exquisite picture of Florence, in the days when she was peaceful, simple, and chaste; when the ladies of Florence did not revel in rich attire, nor daughters prove to be a terror to their fathers, but plied the spindle and distaff in sweet childlike obedience and the pure love of home; and when Florentine nobles were brave and simple, and the city full of high aspirations. Cacciaguida went on to foretell to his descendant his sad exile, and urged him to be brave, and always speak the truth and shame the devil. His exile will be due to the Pope of that city "where Christ is all day long made merchandise," and Dante shall be *maligned*, and shall have experience, —

“How salt a taste cleaves to a patron’s bread,
How hard a task to climb a patron’s stairs.”

Such were the treacheries hidden behind a few revolving years. “I wish not,” he said, “that thou be envious against thy neighbors, because thy life is set in the future, far beyond the chastisement of *their* perfidies.” Dante hopes that the threatened peril will not make him a timid friend to truth; and then the spirit, sparkling like a mirror of gold in the sun’s ray, bids him speak the truth and fear not. Saddened by the prophecy, Dante is encouraged by the glory in the holy eyes of Beatrice, who bids him look on the arms of the visionary cross, while Cacciaguida names the saints who shine upon it, each of whom flashes out as his name is uttered, — Joshua, and Judas Macca-baeus, and Charlemagne, and Roland, and Godfrey of Bouillon, and others.

Then they ascend to the sixth heaven, that of Jupiter, where the flying spirits of

rulers have arranged themselves into the words *Diligite justitiam qui judicatis terram*; and when they reached the last M, they passed into the form of the Lily of Florence with an eagle's head; and then into the Imperial Eagle; and the saints who formed the beak of the Eagle sang of their exaltation through their love of justice and mercy. Then the saints, shining like rubies all over the Eagle, began to compare the justice of man with the larger and infinite justice of God, and then to denounce the reigning sovereigns of Europe,—the Emperor Albert, for invading Bohemia; Philip the Fair of France, for falsifying the coinage; our Edward I., for his ambition; Frederick of Aragon, for luxurious living; and Charles the Lamé of Naples, whose virtues might be represented by I (for one), and his vices by M (for a thousand). The Eagle proceeds to tell that its eye is formed of the spirits of David, Hezekiah, and other good kings, among whom are the once

pagan Trajan and Rhipeus, made perfectly virtuous by miracles of grace. Trajan owes his beatification apparently to a pure mistake. There was, opposite to the Pantheon, in old days, a bas-relief representing a city, symbolized as a woman doing homage to Trajan; this was misinterpreted into the story of Trajan stopping to do justice to the widow, which caused Gregory to secure by his prayers the Emperor's liberation from the Limbo. Trajan was popularly supposed to have been by a miracle resuscitated and baptized, and Rhipeus to have been baptized by the outpouring of the Spirit.

They then passed to the seventh heaven of Saturn, where Beatrice smiles no longer, for otherwise her smile would consume Dante by its burning gleam. For a similar reason no heavenly song is heard there, because it would be too overpowering. This is explained to Dante by St. Peter Damian. In this sphere he sees the golden

ladder of Jacob, emblem of divine contemplation. St. Peter Damian then proceeds (as indeed he had done in life) to denounce the backslidings of the clergy into luxury, sloth, and avarice; whereat the air became full of spirits like flamelets, and a cry like thunder went up from the multitude, which terrified the poet's heart. In this heaven they see St. Benedict, the founder of the great Benedictine order at Monte Cassino. He shines like the largest and brightest of pearls, and he points out "other fires, who were men of contemplation, kindled with that heat which brings to birth the holy flowers and fruits." Among them is the hermit Macarius of Egypt, and St. Romuald, the founder of the Camaldolese in Casentino. St. Benedict promises that higher up he will be visible in bodily form, when Dante has mounted that ladder of Jacob, "to ascend which no one now parts his feet on earth." Then he complains that his famous rule of St. Benedict has now on earth be-

come mere waste paper, because "the walls that used to be an Abbey are now dens of thieves, and the cowls are sacks full of the flour of sin, in which the church hoards her wealth, which she no longer gives to the poor, but to relatives and worse. Luxury now abounds, whereas St. Peter began without gold or silver, and St. Francis in humility, and he himself with prayer and fasting. But now the white is turned to brown, and God alone could perform the miracle of reformation. Then he drew back to his company, which closed up, and gathered itself to heaven as with a whirlwind.

Dante with Beatrice now began to mount the ladder; but in a moment they were in the sign of the Gemini, the heaven of the fixed stars, and they looked down upon earth through all the planetary heavens, smiling at the mean semblance of "the little floor that makes us mortals so fierce." In this heaven they see a vision of the tri-

umph of Christ surrounded by His saints. The Virgin, the Mystic Rose, crowned by the Archangel Gabriel with a wreath of lilies formed of light and melody,—she being herself “the fair sapphire wherewith the brightest heaven is jewelled,”—followed Christ upwards, while the saints chant *Regina Cæli* and remain behind. From the throng came forth the apostle Peter, who examines Dante on faith, and approves his answers. Then St. James questions him concerning hope; and St. John the Evangelist joins them, in light so dazzling that Dante is for the moment blinded. St. John questions Dante about the love of God; and then amid the chant of “*Holy, Holy, Holy,*” Beatrice points out to Dante our father Adam, who speaks to him about the first state of man. But at that point came a change in the effulgence. The saints had all been chanting “Glory to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,” so that—surrounded by what seemed to him the smile of the uni-

verse, and hearing this seraphic chant—Dante feels inebriated with gladness, and exclaims, “O joy! O ineffable blitheness! O life, complete of love and peace! O riches secure without craving!” But then, lo! of the four torches burning before him—the three apostles and Adam—the form of St. Peter began to bicker into a flash of angry redness, sympathetically reflected by the rest of the blessed company, as St. Peter exclaims, “If I change my hue, marvel not. He that usurps on earth My place, My place, My place which is vacant in the sight of the Son of God, has of the city of my burial made a chaos of the blood and of the filth, wherewith the Perverse One is appeased down there, who fell from the place on high.” At these words of indignation, as it were a burning blush overspread the face of heaven, while St. Peter continues that the Church, the Bride of Christ, has not been nurtured by the blood of the early martyrs only to be degraded into gain of

gold, after the martyrdoms and tears of the early and sainted popes; nor were the keys meant to be borne on the Devil's banners to fight against baptized Christians; nor was it ever intended that he (St. Peter) should be a figure on a seal, affixed to traffic and to lying privileges, whereat he often blushed and glowed. But now there are seen in the pastures ravening wolves in shepherds' clothing, and Jews from Cahors and Gascony are preparing to drink our blood. O defence of God, why slumberest thou ever? O good beginning, to what vile end must thou needs fall? But the promise from on high will soon come to aid." St. Peter then bids Dante reveal to the world what he has seen. The air becomes full of a snow of fire, and they mount to the ninth heaven, the *Primum Mobile*, where there is neither time nor place, and "no other Where than the Mind of God." It is the source of all motion, and is girt about with light and love, which suggests to Beatrice

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the meanness of cupidity, so common on earth that innocence and faith remain with babes alone. Then Dante sees a point of intense brightness, and, revolving around it, nine circles, which are the Hierarchies of Angels, respecting whose orders and nature Beatrice discourses to him, digressing for a moment to reprove the silly and vulgar buffooneries which had become common in sermons, of which mediæval records furnish us with many proofs.

Then they mount to the Empyrean and the Rose of the Blessed, which he at first mistakes for a river of light resplendent with splendors, from which issued living sparks, which, like gold-encircled rubies, settled on the flowers upon its banks, until, as though inebriate with odors, they would plunge again into the wondrous stream. The ruby-like sparks are Angels, and the flowers are blessed Spirits. With one parting eulogy of the Emperor Henry of Luxemburg, and denunciation of Boniface VIII.

and Clement V., Beatrice parts from Dante, and takes her place among the blessed, leaving him to the tutelage of the ardent St. Bernard, who shows him the throne where sits the Virgin Mary and the orders of the various saints, and speaks to him of the salvation of infants. St. Bernard breaks into a hymn to the Virgin, and Dante gazes fixedly on the Divine Light. He sees the vision of the Triune God:—

“In that abyss
Of radiance, clear and lofty, seemed methought
Three orbs of triple hue, clipt in one bound,
And from the other, one reflected seemed,
As rainbow is from rainbow: and the third
Seem'd fire, breathed equally from both. O speech,
How feeble and how faint art thou to give
Conceptions birth! Yet this to what I saw
Is less than little. . . .

Here vigor failed the towering fantasy;
But yet the will rolled onward like a wheel
In even motion by the love impelled
That moves the sun in heaven, and all the stars.”

So ends one of the grandest poems ever written. It actually uplifts and dilates our

mortal nature to observe the sublime confidence, the holy audacity of human grandeur, with which the poet ventures, with unfaltering footstep, to tread alike the burning marle of Hell, the steep ascents of Purgatory, and the eternal azure of the floor of Heaven:—nor this only, but also to mingle with Saints, Patriarchs, Apostles, amid the glories of lucent Seraphim and ardent Cherubim:—nor this only, but to stand before the very Throne of the Triune God, in the light of that rainbow in sight like unto an emerald. Of our own Milton another poet says that—

“ He rode sublime
Upon the seraph wings of ecstasy ;
The secrets of the abyss to espy,
He passed the flaming bounds of time and space,
The living throne, the sapphire blaze
Where angels tremble while they gaze :
He saw, but blasted with excess of light,
Closed his eyes in endless light.”

The last line is a fanciful allusion to Milton's blindness; but Dante did not close

his eyes in night. Nay, the inward illumination added to the clearness of the outward vision, and, amid the anguish of his exile and of his earthly defeat, he passed along the steep up-hillward path of life, not only "bating no jot of heart or hope," but more and more confident, and more and more convinced that the Spirit witnesseth with our spirit that we are sons of God;—and that, by His grace, it is possible for us to win that eternal foretaste of immortality, wherein "God is Man in one with Man in God."



JOHN MILTON.

CHAPTER V.

MILTON.

I.

"A TEACHER," says Goethe, "who can arouse a feeling for one single good action, for one single good poem, accomplishes more than he who fills the memory with rows on rows of natural objects."

To me, for years, not only have the poems of Milton been a delight, but his character has been an example, and his thoughts a strong consolation and support. "Character," as Emerson said, "is higher than intellect;" and Milton was not only one of the world's mightiest poets, but also a supremely noble man.

I will endeavor, then, to bring before my readers in this paper a great mind and

a great character. Milton, like Dante, is one of those whose books cannot be separated from his personality. His character is itself a great book. Whenever I can, I shall let Milton speak for himself, especially in the lordly and impassioned eloquence of his prose writings; and as Mr. Gladstone said that hardly before manhood was he aware that Milton had written any prose works at all, and as those works contain some of the most splendid passages in English literature, I may hope that those quotations may turn the attention of my readers to the books themselves.

My estimate of Milton is not loftier than that which has been formed of him by some of the greatest and most sober minds. It has, for instance, been said that Wordsworth was "like Milton in dignity of aim, gravity of life, early and deliberate dedication to poetry, high self-appreciation, haughty self-reliance, and majesty

of sentiment." And Wordsworth called Milton —

"Soul awful, if this world has ever held
An awful soul."

He says, —

"We must be free or die, who speak the tongue
That Shakespeare spoke; the faith and morals hold
That Milton held."

And he sums up his high appreciation in this noble sonnet, —

"Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour
England hath need of thee. She is a fen
Of stagnant waters! altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men.
O raise us up! Return to us again!
And give us manners, freedom, virtue, power.
Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart.
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea;
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free:
So didst thou travel on life's common way
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart
The lowliest burdens on herself did lay."

Walter Savage Landor went so far as to say,

"It may be doubted whether the Creator ever created one altogether so great as Milton, taking into our view at once his manly virtues, his superhuman genius, his zeal for truth, for true piety, true freedom, his contempt for personal power, his glory and exaltation in his country's." And again,

"He indulges in no pranks and vagaries to captivate the vulgar mind; he leads by the light of his countenance, never stooping to grasp a coarse hand to obtain its suffrages. His gravity is unsuitable to the age we live in. The cedars and palms of his Paradise have disappeared; we see the earth before us in an altered form; we see dense and dwarf plants upon it everywhere; we see it scratched by a succession of squatters, who rear a thin crop, and leave the place dry and barren. Constancy and perseverance are among Milton's characteristics, with contempt of everything mean and sordid. Indifference

to celebrity, disdain for popularity, unobtrusive wisdom, sedate grandeur, energy kept in its high and spacious armory until the signal of action sounded, until the enemy was to be driven from his intrenchment,—these are above the comprehension, above the gaze, of noisy drummers, in their caps and tassels. Milton stood conspicuous over the mines of fuel he accumulated for that vast lighthouse, founded on a solitary rock, which threw forth its radiance to Europe from amid the darkness and storminess of the British sea.”

And, to quote but one more eulogium, Tennyson apostrophizes Milton as—

“O mighty mouthed inventor of harmonies,
O skilled to sing of Time or Eternity,
God-gifted organ-voice of England,
Milton, a name to resound for ages.”

We have three authentic and deeply interesting portraits of Milton. The first is a portrait of him when he was a child

of ten years old, by the Dutch painter Cornelius Jansen, painted in 1618. It shows us a little Roundhead, grave, serious, and beautiful; but to give it life, you must, to borrow his own phrase, "envermeil" the round cheek with a healthy rose, and give a gleam of gold to the auburn hair, which his Puritan tutors had cut short. His eyes were hazel; the eyebrows finely pencilled; the mouth a perfect Cupid's bow. Thus, as Aubrey says, "his harmonicall and ingeniose soul did lodge, in a beautiful and well-proportioned body. . . . His complexion was exceeding faire—he had a delicate, tuneable voice." As he stood before his friends, with his thoughtful face, frilled lace collar, and braided dress, he was indeed "a child whom every eye that looked on loved," and one in whom the opening dawn of life seemed to promise a golden day. The father, the good Bread-street scrivener, must have been proud of his little son, or he would

not have paid "five broad pieces" for his likeness. When the picture was engraved, in 1760 by Cipriani, he placed beneath it the very appropriate lines, —

"When I was yet a child no childish play
To me was pleasing ; all my mind was set
Serious to learn, to know, and thence to do,
What might be public good ; myself I thought
Born to that end, born to promote all truth
And righteous things."

We may at once seize on the distinguishing characteristic of Milton's childhood. It was Innocence. His days were

"Bound each to each by natural piety."

Qualis ab incepto might be written broad over his life, as its description. There was no discontinuity in Milton's career. "We cannot make life's reckoning twice over ; you cannot mend a wrong subtraction by doing your addition right." How many, alas, do make youth one long subtraction, of which the deficit can never

be restored! But Milton's character was as unique and stately as his immortal verse. It is to us a rich legacy of ideal and of fulfilment; and with the "unique and superb egoism" which in him is natural, he said, "If God has ever instilled into any human soul an intense love of moral beauty, he has done so into mine."

We pass next to Milton's boyhood, and we may at once seize two of its characteristics.

One was earnest diligence. Here is his own account of his boyhood.

"My father destined me from a child for the pursuits of literature, and my appetite for knowledge was so voracious that from twelve years of age I hardly ever left my study before midnight. This primarily led to my loss of sight. My eyes were naturally weak, and I was subject to frequent headaches, which, however, could not check the advance or retard the progress of my improvement."¹

¹ "The Second Defence of the People of England."

Another characteristic was indomitable perseverance.

“When I take up a thing,” he says, “I never pause or break it off, nor am drawn away from it by any other interest, till I arrive at the goal I had proposed for myself.”

The results of this diligence and perseverance were wonderful. When in church we sing the fine lyric,—

“Let us with a gladsome mind
Praise the Lord for he is kind;”

or,

“How lonely are thy dwellings fair,
O Lord of Hosts, how dear
The pleasant tabernacles are,
Where Thou dost dwell so near,”

we are singing the paraphrases of the Psalms, of which some were written by Milton when he was only a boy of fifteen. I doubt whether there has ever been any boy who could match him in attainments. By the time he was sixteen he had a good

knowledge of Greek, and he was a finished Latin scholar. He wrote Latin prose, that is not a mere echo of Ciceronian phrases, but proves a perfect mastery and individuality; and he composed Latin poems so beautiful and masculine that they still survive. To this he added a good knowledge of the best literature that England had then produced; a considerable acquaintance with French, Italian, and Hebrew; and some practical skill in, and theoretical knowledge of, mathematics and music. I have had some share in the training of several generations of English boys, of whom many have won high honors at Oxford and Cambridge, and not a few have attained to eminence in Church and State; but I never yet saw a boy whose attainments at the age of sixteen distantly approached those of Milton. He must have been a glorious pupil, and one of those — so rarely found — who need the curb more than the spur. When we see “our young barbarians all

at play" at Harrow or Eton, there are, I imagine, but few in these days of whom that can be said. Yet he was no milk-sop or bookworm; he was fond of healthy recreation and manly exercise.

"I was never deficient," he says, "in courage and in strength; and I was wont constantly to exercise myself in the use of the broadsword. Armed with this weapon, as I usually was, I should have thought myself quite a match for any one, though much stronger than myself."¹

At school he made one delightful friend, Charles Diodati, whom he lost too early. There were no wild oats sown in Milton's boyhood to spring up afterwards in their poisonous crop; but he was like one of those mountain ash-trees covered in spring with "creamy and odorous blossoms," which are the promise of the brilliant clusters that make it glow in autumn one blaze of scarlet from its lowest twig to its top-

¹ "The Second Defence."

most bough. He shows "the inevitable congruity between seed and fruit;" his boyhood was not silly, wasted, ignoble, but rich in attainments, and richer still in hopes.

And now we come to Milton's youth. We have a second portrait of him, taken at the age of twenty-one. It shows the same noble, engaging face,—virginal, strong, self-confident; and now he wears the long bright locks which in his childhood his Puritan teachers had cut so short. It was thus he looked when at sixteen he went to Christ College, Cambridge. And this portrait, with its fair, flowing curls, illustrates the nature of Milton's Puritanism. It was no sour and narrow fanaticism; no coarse and dull Philistinism. The ordinary Puritan hated the cathedrals, and loved "to break down the carved work thereof with axes and hammers;" Milton, on the contrary, says,—

"But let my due feet never fail
To walk the studious cloister's pale,

And love the high embow'd roof,
With antique pillars, massy-proof,
And storied windows richly dight,
Casting a dim religious light.
There let the pealing organ blow
To the full-voiced choir below
In service high and anthems clear
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
Dissolve me into ecstasies,
And bring all Heaven before mine eyes."

The ordinary Puritan affected severe precision in dress; Milton liked what was comely. The ordinary Puritan anathematized stage plays; Milton wrote "Masques" to be acted, and liked to refresh himself at the theatre. He sings in his "L'Allegro,"—

"Then to the well-trod stage anon,
If Jonson's learned sock be on;
Or sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,
Warble his native wood-notes wild."

He delighted, too, in the glories of nature, the green fields, the flush of spring, the shadows of the elms, the song of birds. With "his beautiful and well-proportioned

body, bright face, ingenious and harmonical soul," with his "erect and manly gait, bespeaking courage and undauntedness," his ingenuous modesty and moral austerity, — he must have been one of the most perfect youths whom England has ever seen. "I seem to see him here," says Wordsworth, writing at Cambridge,

" Bounding before me, in his scholar's dress,
A boy, no better, with his rosy cheeks,
Angelical, keen eye, courageous look,
And conscious step of purity and pride."

His aspect reflected the soul of one who loved whatsoever things are true and pure and lovely and of good report; and who had already given to the world poems as rich and immortal as the "Ode on the Death of a Fair Infant," and "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," and "At a Solemn Music." He says of himself in an Italian sonnet, "My heart is faithful; fearless; secure in its own adamant though worlds flamed;

free from the malice and fears of the vulgar; loyal to all things manly." "You ask me, Charles, of what I am thinking," he wrote to his friend Diodati; "I think, so help me Heaven, of immortality."

His college days lasted from 1625 to 1632, between the ages of sixteen and twenty-two;—and we might well have supposed that manly beauty of the highest type, singular purity, a temperament perfectly ready to unbend, a capacity for friendship, supreme ability, and unusual attainments, would have secured unbounded popularity for the fair and noble youth. Yet it is clear that he was not popular either with his tutors or with his fellow undergraduates.

We can see the reason for this. He was too independent and too original for the commonplace and stereotyped officers of his college. He was a very hard student in the University, and performed all his exercises with very good applause; yet

Aubrey, or some one who has interpolated his remarks into Aubrey's manuscript, says that he was "publicly whipped" by his tutor Chappell. This assertion is certainly a piece of mean and false University scandal; but Milton seems for a short time to have been "sent down." This cannot have been a punishment for anything discreditable, since he openly speaks of it without the smallest touch of regret or apology.

He disliked and disdained the curriculum of the University, of which Roger Bacon had said, four centuries earlier, "*languet et asininat circum male intellecta.*" He could not bear to be dragged from important studies to employ himself in composing some frivolous and conventional declamation. Cambridge, with "its barren and shadeless fields," he tells us that he had never greatly admired "even in the time of her better health, in his own younger judgment." In this he resembles Gibbon, Shelley, Gray, Landor, and Wordsworth. But

if the Fellows were unjust to him, and wholly failed at first to appreciate and understand him, they afterwards found out their mistake; and he says "signified in many ways how much better it would content them that I should stay: as by many letters, full of kindness and loving respect, both before this time and long after, I was assured of their singular good affection toward me."

If he was not popular with the undergraduates, that, too, may be because he was made of nobler elements. Something in his fresh complexion and bright hair had earned him the nickname of *Domina*, "the lady of Christ's College;" and, as in the case of the younger Pitt, the corrupt, vulgar natures around him may have sneered at his ingenuous modesty and high chastity. He had a reserved nicety and "honest haughtiness of nature" which would not be "Hail fellow well-met" with every Tom, Dick, and Harry who chose to slap him on the back.

"I had rather," he writes, "since the life of man is likened to a scene, that all my exits and entrances should mix with such persons only whose worth erects them and their actions to a grave and tragic deportment, and not to have to do with clowns and vices."

Then, again, he had not much sense of humor, but "a mind made and set only on the accomplishment of the greatest things." Add to this he was a severe critic of his companions and their performances.

The authorities at Christ's College did not elect him to a Fellowship, though they elected many younger men who had not a tenth of his genius. But that his seven years at college were honorably and blamelessly spent is proved by the fact that ultimately, when they grew better able to appreciate his gifts, "most of the Fellows of his college," he says, "showed him no common marks of friendship and esteem," and even endeavored to induce him to stay

at Cambridge, and to give up his purpose of retiring to his father's house.

We now pass from Milton's youth to his years of early manhood, between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-seven. They were years of preparation, supported by the touching faith of his father, who never doubted of the grandeur of his purposes, or of his ultimate success. The good father must doubtless have been disappointed by his declining to take Holy Orders, for which he had been intended. Both in prose and verse Milton has given his reasons for this decision. In "Lycidas" he makes St. Peter say of the death of his young friend, Edward King, —

"How well could I have spared for thee, young swain,
Enow of such, as for their bellies' sake
Creep, and intrude, and climb into the fold !
Of other care they little reckoning make,
Than how to scramble at the shearers' feast,
And shove away the worthy bidden guest ;
Blind mouths ! that scarce themselves know how
to hold

A sheep-hook, or have learn't aught else the least
That to the faithful herdman's art belongs !

What reck's it them ? What need they ? They are
sped !

And when they list, their lean and flashy songs
Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw ;
The hungry sheep look up and are not fed,
But, swoln with wind and the rank mist they
draw,

Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread :
Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw
Dally devours apace, and nothing said."

And in prose he speaks of "The difficult labours of the Church, to whose service, by the intentions of my parents and friends, I was destined of a child, and in mine own resolutions, till, coming to some maturity of years, and perceiving what tyranny had invaded the Church, that he who would take orders must subscribe slave, I thought it better to preserve a blameless silence, before the sacred office of speaking, bought and preserved with servility and forwearing." ¹

¹ "The Reason of Church Government."

Yet Milton, referring to these years of seeming inactivity, says, "I was something suspicious of myself, and do take notice of a certain belatedness in me." In his sonnet written "On his being arrived at the age of twenty-three," he says, —

"How soon hath Time, the subtle thief of youth,
Stolen on his wing my three-and-twentieth year !
My hasting days fly on with full career,
But my late spring no bud or blossom shew'th.
Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth,
That I to manhood am arrived so near ;
And inward ripeness doth much less appear,
Than some more timely-happy spirits endu'th.
Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,
It shall be still in strictest measure even
To that same lot, however mean or high,
Toward which Time leads me, and the Will of
Heaven ;
All is, if I have grace to use it so,
As ever in my great Task-Master's eye."

And surely Milton had no real need for self-reproach. We see from his journal that during those quiet years in the country retirement of Horton he had read and anno-

tated no less than eighty solid books, and he must have spent many a studious hour in the library which still exists in the tower of Langley Church. He still ever cherished his inward conviction "that by labour, and intense study, which I take to be my portion in this life, joined to the prompting of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written as men should not willingly let die."

In this lofty self-confidence "which let Malice call Pride" he resembled Dante and Bacon, and Shakespeare. He was anxious "not to press forward, but to keep off with a sacred reverence and religious advisement, how *best* to undergo — not taking thought of being late, so it gave advantage to the more fit: for those who were late lost nothing."

And indeed he must have been a stern critic of himself if he thought the years "belated" in which, having thus "pledged himself to God and his own conscience,"

he was but pluming his own wings and meditating flight. During this quiet time he gave to the world such precious and immortal poems as "L'Allegro," "Il Penseroso," "Arcades," "Lycidas," and "Comus;" while during the whole period he was "gazing on the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies."

We have fixed on innocence as the characteristic of Milton's childhood; on earnest diligence and perseverance as the notes of his boyhood; nor were the specific marks of his youth less noble. They were steadfastness of purpose, resolute purity of life, and lofty self-respect.

Milton's steadfastness of purpose was exceptionally strong. No part of his life was lived at haphazard. He never was one of those who yielded to the "weight of chance desires," nor would he suffer his earthly existence to be mere "flotsam and jetsam" on the sea of time. There are many who drift through life, many who

shamble through life, many who stagger and fall through life; but the ideal of Milton was that of "The Happy Warrior."

"It is the generous spirit, who, when brought,
Among the tasks of real life, hath wrought
Upon the plan that pleased his boyish thought.
Whose high endeavours are an inward light
That makes the path before him always bright;
Who, with a rational instinct to discern
What knowledge can perform, is diligent to learn,
Abides by his resolve, and stops not there,
But makes his moral being his prime care."

The next mark of his youth was resolute purity of life, and on this I cannot do better than quote his own glorious words both in prose and verse. His "Comus" is mainly an immortal eulogy on the irresistible might and beauty of chastity. The Elder Brother has reminded the Younger that their Sister, who has lost her way in the wood, is not so defenceless as he supposes, since she has a hidden strength; not only the strength of Heaven, but—

“’Tis Chastity, my Brother, Chastity :
 She that has that, is clad in complete steel ;
 And, like a quiver’d Nymph with arrows keen,
 May trace huge forests, and unharbour’d heaths,
 Infamous hills, and sandy perilous wilds ;

.

So dear to Heaven is saintly Chastity,
 That, when a soul is found sincerely so,
 A thousand liveried angels lackey her,
 Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt.”

This is only a fragment of that noble speech which I recommend to my youthful readers. And in his “Apology for Smectymnuus” he wrote this most glorious passage.

“And long it was not when I was confirmed in this opinion, that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things ought himself to be a true poem ; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honourablest things. Even then I learned what a noble virtue chastity sure must be — only this my mind gave me that every free and gentle

spirit without that oath, ought to be born a knight, nor needed to expect the gilt spur, or the laying of a sword upon his shoulder to stir him up to secure and protect the weakness of any attempted chastity." And, he adds, that, besides his careful training in the Christian religion, "a certain reservedness of natural disposition and moral discipline learnt out of the noblest philosophy was enough to keep me in disdain of far less incontinencies. . . . But having had the doctrine of Holy Scripture unfolding those chaste and high mysteries with timeliest care infused, that the body is for the Lord, and the Lord for the body — I argued to myself that if unchastity in a woman be such a scandal and dishonour, then certainly in a man it must, though commonly not so thought, be much more deflouring and dishonourable."

The third mark of his dawning manhood was that high self-respect, on which I will quote from his "Reason of Church Govern-

ment," a passage that has always seemed to me one of the most precious in the English language. As is the case with the other passage to which I have referred, it should be read entire, but here, for want of space, I must abbreviate.

"But there is a yet more ingenuous and noble degree of honest shame, or call it if you will, an esteem, whereby men bear an inward reverence toward their own persons. And if the love of God, as a fire sent from heaven, to be ever kept alive upon the altar of our hearts, be the first principle of all godly and virtuous actions in men, this pious and just honouring of ourselves is the second, and may be thought as the radical moisture and fountain-head whence every laudable and worthy enterprise issues forth. Something I confess it is to be ashamed of evil-doing in the presence of any; and to reverence the opinion and countenance of a good man rather than a bad, fearing most in his sight to offend, goes so far as almost

to be virtuous ; yet this is but still the fear of infamy, and many such, when they find themselves alone, saving their reputation, will compound with other scruples, and come to a close treaty with their dearer vices in secret. But he that holds himself in reverence and due esteem, both for the dignity of God's image upon him and for the price of his redemption, which he thinks is visibly marked upon his forehead, accounts himself both a fit person to do the noblest and godliest deeds, and much better worth than to deject and defile, with such a debasement and such a pollution as sin is, himself so highly ransomed and ennobled to a new friendship and filial relation with God. Nor can he fear so much the offence and reproach of others as he dreads and would blush at the reflexion of his own severe and modest eye upon himself, if it should see him doing or imagining that which is sinful, though in the deepest secrecy."

We pass on now to a fifth stage in Milton's life,—his travels. He set out for the Continent in the year 1638, when he had reached the age of twenty-nine. His father, never swerving in his confidence about his son's aims, cheerfully paid his expenses. Sir Henry Wotton gave him the kind and well-meant advice "*I pensieri stretti ed il viso sciolto*" (thoughts close and face frank'). But such advice was not for Milton, even in the home of the Inquisition. In that memorable journey he conversed with the great Grotius, was welcomed by the highest literary society of Florence, had an interview with "the starry Galileo," and was received with open arms by the Marquis Giovanni Battista Manso at Naples, in the palace that had already given a home to Marini and Tasso. The two Latin lines that Manso addressed to Milton, saying that he would have been an angel if he had not been an Anglican, show both that Milton still re-

tained his remarkable personal beauty, and also the indomitable courage, freedom, and truthfulness which made it impossible for him, for the sake of popularity, to conceal the fervor of his Protestant opinions. How well would it have been for England if all young Englishmen at the close of their travels — especially in days when Italy was unspeakably corrupt, and the proverb ran, "*Inglese italianato diavolo incarnato*" — could have said, as Milton did amid the calumnious lies of his enemies.

"I take God to witness, that in all those places where so many things are considered lawful, I lived sound and untouched from any profligacy and vice, having this thought perpetually with me, that though I might escape the eyes of men, I certainly could not escape the eye of God."

So far, then, we have traced the career of Milton, and illustrated it by his writings up to the period of his full manhood. We shall now, with a similar method, read the "Great Books" of his life and character until the close.

II.

The sixth stage of Milton's biography is the period of *Sturm und Drang*, — of storm and strife, of calamities and disappointments. It might almost be said that at thirty ended the ease and unclouded happiness of his life. His travels were suddenly cut short by the stern and threatening news that kept reaching him from England. He was personally saddened by the intelligence of the early death of his best friend, Charles Diodati. At the stern trumpet-call of Duty, he at once broke the even tenor and laid aside the settled purpose of his life.

"I considered it dishonourable," he wrote,

"to be taking my ease in foreign lands while my countrymen were striking a blow for freedom." He did, indeed, as he tells us, hate the task of political conflict; but he did not shrink from it.

"I trust to make it manifest," he wrote, "with what small willingness I endure to interrupt no less hopes than these, and leave a calm and pleasing solitariness, fed with cheerful, confident thoughts, to embark on a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes."¹ Never abandoning the high purpose of his youth, to write some immortal epic on one of the thirteen subjects from which he ultimately selected "Paradise Lost," he laid the intention aside during the best years of his life, because he thought that God called him to a more urgently needful, if infinitely less delightful, task. We know not whether more to admire the steadfastness of his purpose, or the heroic self-sacrifice with

¹ "The Reason of Church Government."

which for such long and stormy years it was laid aside, or the passion for liberty which made the efforts for the good of his country seem a supreamer aim.

The intensity of his patriotic feelings is illustrated by language that seems to flush with burning passion. The closing paragraphs of his "Reformation in England" furnish a specimen of this white heat of conviction, and they are further interesting from their prophecy of his own future intentions.

"Then," he says, "amidst the hymns and hallelujahs of saints, some one may perhaps be heard offering at high strains in new and lofty measure to sing and celebrate Thy divine mercies and marvelous judgments in this land throughout all ages . . . whereby this great and warlike nation may press on hard . . . to be found the soberest, wisest, and most Christian people, when Thou the Eternal King shalt open the clouds to judge the several king-

doms of the world . . . where they undoubtedly that, by their labours, counsels, and prayers, have been earnest for the common good of religion and their country, shall receive, above the inferior orders of the blessed the regal addition of principalities, legions, and thrones, unto their glorious titles, and in supereminence of beatific vision, progressing the dateless and irrevoluble circle of eternity, shall clasp inseparable hands with joy and bliss on overmeasure for ever.

But they contrariwise, that by impairing and diminution of the true faith, the distress and servitude of their country, aspire to high dignity, rule, and promotion here, after a shameful end in this life (which God grant them) shall be thrown down eternally into the darkest and deepest gulf of hell, where, under the despiteful control, the trample and spurn of all the other damned — that, in the anguish of their torture, shall have no other ease than to exer-

cise a raving and bestial tyranny over them, as their slaves and negroes, they shall remain in that plight for ever, the basest, the lowermost, the most dejected, most underfoot, and down-trodden vassals of perdition."

Language so tremendous is not of course to be taken quite *au pied de la lettre*, but it serves to illustrate the fiery earnestness generated by the awful struggles involved in the achievement of freedom by the English people.

Milton did not, indeed, at once plunge into the vortex of civil strife, either as a soldier or as a statesman; but, waiting till God opened the way for him, he became the champion of his country in those intellectual regions wherein all conflicts must be ultimately decided. For twenty years he fought against the tyranny of kings and prelates, pouring out pamphlet after pamphlet of powerful Latin and magnificently impassioned English, in defence of the Puritans and of the Parliament. Mean-

while he engaged in the task of trying to carry out his ideal of education. In his fine "Tractate," he says, "I call a complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully, and magnanimously, all offices, both public and private, of peace and war . . . and the true end of learning is to repair the ruin of our first parents, by regaining to know God aright."

From this period begins the story of Milton's calamities; and it is sad that among the heaviest we must count his marriage. It was the first wave in the awful flood of his misfortunes. Won by the face of Mary Powell, then seventeen, and clothing her with imaginary perfection, he took the girl from the loose freedom of her home in the house of a roistering and bankrupt Cavalier only to be fearfully disillusioned, and in all probability grossly outraged, before the honeymoon was over. He found her a mere Philistine; utterly incompatible; an image of phlegm and re-

pellency; while she, for her part, found in the quiet and studious home of the Puritan something between a tomb and a torment.

She left him, and returned to her home. She did not answer his letters, and dismissed his messengers with contempt. Stung to the very depths of his indignant being, he wrote those pamphlets on divorce which raised a swarm of hornets about his ears. Afterwards she flung herself at his feet, and implored his pardon.

We have a reminiscence of the scene, in "Paradise Lost," where Eve weeps before her ruined husband:—

"She ended weeping; and her lowly plight,
Immovable, till peace obtain'd from fault
Acknowledged and deplored, in Adam wrought
Commiseration: soon his heart relented
Toward her, his life so late, and sole delight,
Now at his feet submissive in distress.

.

As one disarmed his anger all he lost,
And thus, with peaceful words, upraised her soon."

He not only took her back with magnanimous forgiveness, but, during the civil troubles, gave a free home to her insulting and impecunious family. His infant son died; but she bore him three daughters, who, by a fatal atavism, reproduced the characteristics of their mother's family. They were undutiful and unloving. They cheated and pilfered him in his blindness, and lit the fires of hell upon his hearth. He loved dearly his second wife, Katherine Cockwood "my late espoused saint," to whom he addressed an exquisite sonnet; but he lost her and her infant child within a year. His third wife, Elizabeth Minshull, was kind and loving; but the intolerable family feuds between her and her wretched stepdaughters at last necessitated an arrangement by which they lived elsewhere.

The next calamity from which he had to suffer was the overwhelming deadliness of hatred which, in doing his duty, he was called on to endure from all sides.

Salmasius and Morus exhausted the vocabulary of vituperation in describing him as a physical monster and a moral leper. They disseminated the grossest lies about his person and about his life; and it must be remembered that, at that time, Salmasius had the ear of Europe. One of his contemporaries was not ashamed to describe "Paradise Lost" as "a profane and lascivious poem." The rage against him vented itself in unparalleled execrations, in personal threats, in nameless insults. Let two instances suffice. Even the excellent Bishop Hacket, in his life of Lord Keeper Williams, has no better terms for Milton than these,

"What a venomous spirit is in that serpent Milton, that black-mouthed Zoilus that blows his viper's breath upon those immortal devotions [the Eikon Basilike]—a petty schoolboy scribbler . . . Get thee behind me, Milton! Thou savourest not the things that be of truth and loyalty, but of

pride, bitterness, and falsehood. But there will be a time, though such a dead dog in Abishai's phrase . . . this canker worm Milton escape for a while."

The famous scene in Sir Walter Scott's "Woodstock" is in accordance with facts. The old Cavalier, Sir Henry Lee, bursts into execration against his nephew, Markham Everard, for having induced him to praise the noble lines in "Comus" which begin,—

"O welcome, pure-eyed Faith, white-banded Hope,
Thou hovering angel girt with golden wings,

before he was aware of the name of their author. When Master Kerneguy (who is Charles II. in the disguise of a page) tells him that the lines were by John Milton, the old knight bursts out in furious astonishment,—

"John Milton! What! John Milton the blasphemous and bloody-minded author of the 'Defensio Populi Anglicani!' the advocate of the infernal High Court of

Fiends ; the Creature and parasite of that grand impostor, that loathsome hypocrite, that detestable monster, that prodigy of the Universe, that disgrace of mankind, that landscape of iniquity, that sink of sin, and that compendium of baseness, Oliver Cromwell ! Markham Everard, I will never forgive thee — never, never ! Thou hast made me speak words of praise respecting one whose offal should fatten the region kites.”

The scene is closely true to history ; and even in his sublime independence of human sympathy “like that with which mountains fascinate and rebuff us,” there is no doubt that Milton keenly felt this madness of hatred, and this tornado of lies. Yet when he began to sing the archangelic strains of “Paradise Lost,” it was

“ With voice unchanged
To hoarse or mute, tho’ fall’n on evil days,
On evil days tho’ fall’n, and evil times,
In darkness, and with danger compassed round
And solitude.”

To these miseries was added the trial that might well have seemed the most utterly irreparable to a proud and lonely scholar, the horror of blindness, with the helpless dependence that it involves. And this happened to him at the age of forty-three. How awfully he felt it may be seen in that most tragic outburst of wailing in *Samson Agonistes*, which begins:—

“But chief of all,
O loss of sight, of thee I most complain:
Blind among enemies! O worse than chains,
Dungeon, or beggary, or decrepit age.”

Yet he tells us that he was ready to pay even this cost in the accomplishment of his duty:—

“My glory is to have lost them overplied
In liberty’s defence my noble task,
Whereof all Europe rings from side to side.”

And again, “It is not so wretched to be blind as not to be capable of enduring blindness. I would not have listened to the voice even of *Æsculapius* himself from

the shrine of Epidaurus in preference to the suggestions of the heavenly monitor within my breast. My resolution was unshaken, though the alternative was either the loss of my sight, or the desertion of my duty."

His enemies represented his blindness as a Divine judgment; he replied that it was neither the object of his shame nor of his regret. "I am not depressed," he said, "by any sense of the Divine displeasure — in the most momentous periods I have had full experience of the divine favor and protection; in the solace and the strength which have been infused into me I have been enabled to do the will of God. I oftener think of what He has bestowed than on what He has withheld. I am unwilling to exchange my consciousness of rectitude with that of any other person, and I feel the recollection a treasured store of tranquillity and delight." And in the "Paradise Lost" he sings: —

“Yet not the more
Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt
Clear spring, or shady grove, or sunny hill,
Smit with the love of sacred song.”

We now come to the last epoch of his life. In 1660 came the culminating and least consolable misery which befel him, — the total ruin of his party; the utter conflagration of all his hopes; the scattering of dust and ashes over all his glory; the giving of his fruit unto the caterpillar, and his labor unto the grasshopper; the sight of the corpse of Freedom, as she lay done to death by vile stabs, and left there to be trampled under the hoofs of swine.

Even at this far-off day, we can hardly think of the epoch of the Stuart Restoration, its public disgraces, its private infamies, its mean and revolting tyranny, its lickspittle servility, its reversion from virtuous and noble manhood to the lewdness of the ape and the cunning ferocity of the tiger, without a blush of shame. It

was, as Macaulay says, a day "of servitude without loyalty, and sensuality without love; of dwarfish talents and gigantic vices; the paradise of cold hearts and narrow minds; the golden age of the coward, the bigot, and the slave."

How must such a man as Milton have felt, amid

"The barbarous dissonance
Of Bacchus and his revellers!"

His ideals were in the dust; his enemies were triumphant; his friends were dead on the scaffold, or exiled, or imprisoned; his name was infamous; his principles were execrated; his property was seriously impaired by the vicissitudes of the times. The body of the great Protector — by an infamously mean revenge, which even Pagans had scorned — had been exhumed from its grave in Westminster Abbey, and hung on the gibbet; his head had been stuck on a spike upon the roof of Westminster Hall.

Vane had perished on the scaffold, and they who saw him ride thither had seemed to see Virtue herself seated by his side. The corpse of the heroic Blake, and of many other noble Puritans, had been flung out of the Abbey into a promiscuous pit in St. Margaret's churchyard.

The cause which Milton deemed to be the cause of Heaven had been shattered as if by red hot thunderbolts; his life was in peril, his name was outraged by men whose fathers he would have disdained to set among the dogs of his flock. And now a degraded England, in her most degraded epoch, was complacently slobbering the feet of a perjured rake, who, in such religion as he retained, amid his gross and endless adulteries, was a crypto-Romanist, and was complacently pocketing the subsidies of France.

Private losses and public miseries came on Milton in a flowing tide, with wave on wave. The Plague of 1665 turned the

neighborhood of his home into pest-fields. The Great Fire of 1666 destroyed the last house that he possessed. If you would know what he felt, look at his last portrait taken at the age of sixty-two. It is a face which, as it were, "deep scars of thunder had entrenched;" and yet it retained its severe composure, and shows English intrepidity mixed with unutterable sorrow. Life had indeed proved herself a cruel stepmother to that sweet child, to that beautiful and poetic boy, to that royally endowed youth. It was in the "Samson Agonistes" that he unbosomed all his feelings. It is almost an autobiography of his old age. He, like Samson, was: —

"Eyeless at Gaza, in a mill, with slaves."

He, like Samson, was forced to say, —

"Nor am I in the list of those that hope ;
Hopeless are all my evils, all remediless ;
This one prayer yet remains, might I be heard
No long petition ; speedy death
The close of all my miseries, and the balm."

In the magnificent chorus "God of Our Fathers," he expresses the awful perplexity of our souls as we face the afflictions and apparently deadly ingratitude that God sends, not only to the common rout of men, who —

"Grow up and perish, like the summer fly,
Heads without name, no more remembered,"

but even to those whom He had eminently adorned with gifts and grace; who, amid every complication of catastrophe, have to cry, "All thy waves and storms are gone over me!" Yet even under this immense accumulation of all the calamities which might have seemed most crushing, Milton could write for himself —

"Come, come; no time for lamentation now,
Nor much more cause. Samson hath quit himself
Like Samson, and heroically hath finished
A life heroic;"

and he could close his statuesque and mon-

umental drama with such calm words of faith as these, —

“ All is best, tho’ we oft doubt
What the unsearchable dispose
Of highest wisdom brings about,
And ever best found in the close.”

And indeed for Milton, as for all good Christians, there were alleviations. Fame, if that were anything, still reached his ears, and Dryden, the Poet Laureate, in his later days acknowledged his supremacy. Friends sought him out, and high-souled youths like John Phillips and Cyriack Skinner, and Henry Lawrence and the Quaker Thomas Ellwood, loved him and looked up to him. In 1665 he published the “Paradise Lost,” in 1670 the “Paradise Regained,” and so consummated the glory, and completed the purpose of his life.

Above all — when everything that made life worth living seemed to be lost — Milton was still Milton. Like the Hebrew

Christians, amid the spoiling of his worldly goods and the collapse of other earthly blessings, he could still be cheerful, because he still had himself as "a better possession and an abiding."

We have two last glimpses of him. One is given us by the painter Richardson, who describes him, in 1671, with the bookseller Millington leading him by the hand. He is dressed in a green camblet coat, and no longer wears his small silver-hilted sword; and sometimes he might be seen sitting in a gray, coarse coat at the door of his house in Bunhill Fields in warm sunny weather, to enjoy the fresh air.

A little later on, a Dorsetshire clergyman, Dr. Wright, saw him "in a small house, up one pair of stairs, sitting in an elbow chair, in black clothes, in a room hung with rusty green, neat enough, pale, but not cadaverous, courteous and stately in manner, and his voice still musically agreeable." The end was not far off. On

Nov. 8, 1674, "the gout struck in," and with perfect calm and faith he passed, after the martyrdom of that life of hurricane and disappointment, —

"To where beyond these voices there is peace."

I have endeavored to point out the characteristics of Milton's childhood, of his boyhood, of his youth and early manhood. I think that the two leading characteristics of the troubled later half of his life were indomitable fortitude and unswerving faith. What is fortitude? Locke tells us that it is "the quiet possession of a man's self, and an undisturbed doing of his duty whatever evil besets him or danger lies in his way." If so, was there any one who showed it more heroically than this poet, who in his blindness, persecution, peril, and misery could yet write, —

"I argue not

Against Heaven's hand or will, nor bate a jot
Of heart or hope, but still bear up and steer
Right onward."

And as for unswerving faith, the principle of his life even in youth was —

“All is, if I have faith to use it so,
As ever in my great Taskmaster's eye.”

The law of his life was “Be thou faithful unto death,” and he believed the promise, “I will give thee the crown of life.” And thus, amid the frightful welter of national and individual catastrophe which crashed in ruin about his later years, Milton was enabled, by the grace of God, with calm of mind and new acquist of experience, all passions spent, “to wait in peaceful darkness for the unconceived Dawn.”

These, then, are the high lessons which his life has to teach us,—in childhood a sweet seriousness; in boyhood a resolute diligence; in youth high self-respect and the white flower of a blameless life; in manhood self-sacrificing energy and heroic public service; and amid the crowded agonies of all his later years an inflexible for-

titude and an indomitable faith. He, like Robert Browning, "believed in the soul and was very sure of God." And the truths he has chiefly to teach are that —

"Virtue would see to do what virtue would,
By her own radiant light, though sun and moon
Were in the flat sea sunk :

and

"He that hath light within his own clean breast
May sit i' the centre and enjoy bright day;
But he that hath a dark soul and foul thoughts,
Benighted walks under the midday sun;
Himself is his own dungeon."

In these two papers I may seem to have been speaking much more of a Great Man than of "Great Books;" but I have already explained that Milton's immortal writings, both in verse and prose, are, to an unusual extent, the reflection of his splendid personality. My object in these papers has been, simply and solely, to encourage in my readers, and especially in the young,

a love for good reading; and it has seemed to me that dealing with Milton —

“Whose soul was like a star and dwelt apart,”

I might the more easily induce some to study his writings if I tried to set before them the way in which those writings illustrate the grandeur of soul that characterizes one of the noblest of England's sons.

CHAPTER VI.

THE IMITATION OF CHRIST.

I HAVE spoken in these papers of the glory and the benefit of great books in general; I have pointed to the supremely imaginative grandeur of those mighty lessons which we may learn from Shakspeare, that "Master of those who know." I have spoken of Milton, towering, like a colossal statue of antique Parian marble, over those low levels of sluggish life "where every molehill is a mountain, and every thistle a forest tree." I have dwelt on the keen insight, homely wisdom, and spiritual faithfulness of John Bunyan, the immortal tinker of Bedford. I have devoted three papers to those lessons of consummate grandeur which we may learn from the "Divina Commedia" of

Dante. If these papers have helped any of my younger readers to seek and to love that imperial society into which great books will admit them; if they have taught anyone how to relieve the oppressive pettiness of life by seeking the crowned circle of poets "with their garlands and singing robes about them;" if they have induced any to profit by the wisdom of those from whom we all may learn, "the great in conduct and the pure in thought," — then they will not have been in vain. They will have helped, in their small measure, to uplift us above our own selfishness; to enlarge, and to brighten, the narrow and dim horizon of our little lives.

What the book is of which I would now speak, and why I speak of it, you will best learn from this scene in the pages of a great work of fiction.¹

A young girl, full of imagination and sensibility, is painfully burdened with the trials and unsatisfied yearnings of life.

¹ George Eliot, "The Mill on the Floss."

Rebelling against her lot, fainting under its loneliness, her eyes often filling with idle tears, she is frightened by the sense that it would not be difficult for her to become a very demon. In this mood, at once miserable and rebellious, she goes into her little attic, to find relief in books. She thinks that it is part of the hardship of her life that there is laid upon her the burden of larger wants than others seem to feel; that she is constantly troubled with a vague, hopeless yearning for that *something*, whatever it is, that is greatest and best on earth.

“Poor child ! as she leaned her head against the window frame, with her hands clasped tighter and tighter, and her foot beating the ground, she was as lonely in her trouble as if she had been the only girl in the civilized world. Her soul was untrained for inevitable struggles.” Owing to the stereotyped inanity of her education, she had no share in the hardwon treasures of thought which generations of painful toil

have laid up for the race of men. Her intellectual outfit, like that of thousands, consisted only of shreds and patches of feeble literature and false history; she had much futile "information," but "no knowledge of those irreversible laws without and within her, which, when they govern the habits, become morality, and when they develop the feelings become religion."

At last her eyes glance over the books that lie on the window-shelf. Most of them she listlessly pushes aside; but she is caught by the name of one of them, and she takes up the little old clumsy volume with some curiosity. It had the corners turned down in many places; and some hand, now forever quiet, had made at certain passages strong pen-and-ink marks, long since browned by time. Maggie turns from leaf to leaf, and reads where the quiet hand pointed; and here are some of the things which she read from this old book:

"Know that the love of thyself doth

hurt thee more than anything in the world. If thou seekest this or that, and wouldest be here or there, to enjoy thine own will and pleasure, thou shalt never be quiet, nor free from care : in everything, somewhat will be wanting ; and in every place there will be some that will cross thee. Above and below, which way soever thou turnest, thou wilt find the cross, and must have patience, if thou wilt have inward peace, and enjoy an everlasting crown. If thou desire to mount into this height, thou must set out courageously, and lay the axe at the root of inordinate inclination to thyself and to private and earthly good. Overcome self-love, and thou wilt have peace. Many have suffered much more than thou ; call to mind their sufferings, and thou shalt easier bear thy little adversities : but if thy troubles seem to thee not little, may not the cause be thine own impatience ? Blessed are those ears that receive the whispers of the Divine voice, and listen not to the

whisperings of the world. Blessed are they who seek not petty human falsities, but to the Truth which teacheth inwardly."

This was what the young girl read; and as she read such words, "a strange thrill of awe passed through her, as if she had been awakened in the night by a strain of solemn music, telling her of those whose souls had been astir while hers was in stupor."

She went on reading, and read,

"Why dost thou gaze about thee here, since this is not thy place of rest? Earth is but thy passing journey heavenwards. All things pass away, and thou with them. Cleave not unto them, lest thou be entangled and perish. If a man should give up all, it is as nothing. The one thing necessary is that, having left all, he should leave himself, and go wholly out of himself, and retain nothing of self-love. For-sake thyself, resign thyself. Then shall all vain imaginations, evil disturbances, superfluous cares, fly away. Immoderate fear

and inordinate love shall leave thee, and thou shalt have inward peace."

"Maggie," says the writer, "drew a long breath, and pushed her heavy hair back, as if to see a sudden vision of life more clearly. Here, then, was a secret of life that would enable her to renounce all other secrets, — she must stand out of herself, she must regard her life as an insignificant part of a divinely guided whole. This voice out of the far-off Middle Ages was the direct communication of a human soul's belief and experience. It came to her as an unquestioned message. The reason why the small, old-fashioned book, for which you need only pay 6*d.* at a book-stall, works miracles to this day, turning bitter waters into sweetness, is because it was written down by a hand that waited for the heart's promptings; it is the chronicle of a solitary, hidden anguish, struggle, trust, and triumph; and so it remains to all time, a lasting record of human needs

and human consolations, the voice of a brother who, years ago, felt and suffered and renounced,—in the cloisters perhaps, with serge gown and tonsured head, with much chastening and long fasts, and with a fashion of speech different from ours, but under the same silent, far-off heavens, and with the same passionate desires, the same strivings, the same failures, the same weariness.”

Now, what was the name of this book which the young girl found, and which taught her, as it may teach us, patience and self-renunciation, and thus to find peace amidst the trials of life, and “the quotidian ague of its frigid impertinences”? It was the “*Imitation of Christ*,” usually attributed to St. Thomas à Kempis. Its permanent and universal popularity shows how it can meet the wants and stir the feelings of the human heart. Not even the “*Pilgrim’s Progress*,” with the potent spell of its allegory, has reached the same astonishing pre-eminence of popularity. It

is a proof that "the voice of the Sibyl," i.e., the voice of inspiration, as the old Greek thinker said, uttering things simple and unperfumed and unadorned, reaches through unnumbered years by the aid of God."

The "Imitation of Christ" has been in men's hands for some five centuries. Its editions are to be counted by thousands; and though it was written by one of different nationality, of different life, of different religion, from our own, — though, since he was laid in his unknown grave, empires have risen and fallen, churches have flourished and decayed, yet even here in England, and at this close of the nineteenth century, it is probable that nearly every educated man possesses a copy of the book, and is familiar with those "brief, quivering sentences" which make us feel, while we read them, as if we had laid our hand upon the heart, throbbing with sorrows like our own, that beat so many centuries ago in the old monk's breast.

Who wrote this famous book? It cannot be known with certainty. The writer himself said, "Love to be unknown," and "Search not who spoke this or that, but attend to what is spoken." The main glory of the authorship — though the writer held it mere vanity to seek for earthly glory — belongs either to Thomas à Kempis, a German monk, or to Jean Gerson, ambassador of the King of France at the Council of Constance, and one of the grandest figures of his time.

Both of them lived in that dreary age of lead and iron, of political anarchy and ecclesiastical degradation, of war, famine, misery, and corruption, which marked the early years of the fifteenth century. Thomas à Kempis, born in 1379, died at the age of ninety-two; Gerson, born in 1363, died at sixty-one. Thus they were contemporaries for forty-five years of their lives, but they were men of utterly different destinies. Thomas, son of a humble arti-

san, a copier of manuscripts, was received into a monastery at twenty-one, and lived in his cell for seventy-one years of almost unbroken calm and uneventful obscurity, most happy when he was alone, "*in angello cum libello*," — in a little corner with a little book.

Far different was the tumultuous, impassioned career of the Frenchman Jean Gerson, "the most Christian Doctor," as he was called. His life rang with combats and contradictions. Living in the perilous days of Azincour and the Great Schism, — in the days when a maniac was King of France, and a monster was Pope of Rome, — he moved in thunderstorms. In religious controversy we find him now denying the autocracy of popes in language which leads to his denunciation by Romish bishops as a precursor of the Reformation, and now persuading the Council of Constance to burn John Huss, the Wycliffe of Bohemia. And when his life seemed to

have culminated in one long failure; when the University of Paris, of which he had become Chancellor at thirty-one, and whose authority he had so splendidly supported, was humiliated and crushed; when he had to fly in disguise from land to land; when he had wholly failed to elevate a sordid and avaricious episcopate, or reform an ignorant and corrupted priesthood, then — forced to see how little is man even at his greatest, and how “man’s nothing-perfect” shrivels into insignificance before the all-completeness of God — the great chancellor, who had been the soul of mighty councils and the terror of contumacious popes, takes his obscure refuge in a humble monastery, and there passes his days in deepest humility and submission. His earlier ambitions had faded from his soul like the burning hues of a stormy sunset; but as, when the sunset crimson has faded, we see the light of the eternal stars, so, when the painted vapors of earthly objects

had lost their coloring, Gerson could gaze at last on those "living sapphires" that glow in the deep firmament of spiritual hopes. He who had taken an honored place among princes and cardinals, now gathered the little children round him, and leading them to the altar, taught them there to uplift their little innocent white hands to heaven, and to pray for him, "O my God! O my Creator! have pity on thy poor servant, Jean Gerson." So, with the lambs of Christ gathered round his dying bed, that he might breathe his last amid their purity and peace, died the greatest orator and leader of his day; and on his tomb they carved the two words "*Sursum corda*," Lift up your hearts!

But though both the humble German, Thomas à Kempis, and the fiery Frenchman, Jean Gerson, may have had some share in writing the "Imitation of Christ," it really has no single author. It is the legacy

of ages, the gospel of all that was best in monasticism, "the psalter of the solitary," "the epic poem of the inward life." It has been compared to a monastic garden, filled with "the white lilies of purity, the roses of Divine love, the blue cyantias of heavenly prayer." It is an outcome of the ascetic ideal, with its glorification of humility, labor, and obedience. Its spirit is that of the Saint Benedict who one evening stood in the window of his monastery at Monte Cassino, and saw the wide world beneath him bathed in glory and sunshine, and "*inspexit et despexit*" gazed on, and looked down upon it all! It recalls the stories of how St. Bernard, as a boy, plunged into the icy pool, and stood in it neck deep to subdue rebellious passions; and how they found St. Bonaventura washing the humblest vessels of his convent, when they came to offer him a cardinal's hat; and how, when he was asked the source of his astonishing knowledge, he pointed in silence to

his crucifix ; and how St. Francis of Assisi stripped himself of everything, and begged for the sake of the Church of God ; and how St. Thomas Aquinas breathed the daily prayer, " Give me, O God ! a noble heart, which no earthly affection can drag down ; " and how when the vision appeared to him and said, " Thou hast written well of me, O Thomas ! what reward dost thou desire ? " he answered with meek rapture, "*Non aliam, nisi Te Domine.*" " No other reward than Thyself, O Lord ! "

What the book mainly teaches is self-renunciation. It is the best expression of the eternal yearning of the soul, its profound self-questionings, its pathetic familiarity with the love of God in Christ. We are not called upon to be monks, or to hide ourselves in solitude :

" We need not bid, for cloistered cell,
Our neighbor and our work farewell,
Nor strive to wind ourselves too high
For sinful man beneath the sky ;—

but yet we may learn from this book that if we would escape "the contagion of the world's slow stain" we must often be alone with our own thoughts, and that "Solitude is the audience-chamber of God." In an age of so much religious lacquer and sham as this is, when

" We seek all lands from pole to pole,
We chatter, nod, and hurry by,
And never once possess our soul
Before we die,"

how good for us to read in this book the chapters on thoroughly searching our own consciences ; and on holy purposes of amendment ; how good it is to strengthen our convictions that God has revealed Himself in His works and in His Son, so that, both without and within us, the natural and the supernatural coexist eternally, and God hath not left Himself without witness to any human soul.

I would specially, however, point to two

great lessons which we may learn from this book.

1. The first is the truth which the writer so well brings out — Romanist and priest and monk though he was — of the direct, perpetual, immediate, unimpeded access of the soul to God. It is the very inmost *virus* of Romanism, and of all systems which imbibe its errors, that they would fain intrude human priests, imperfect as they always are, and grossly corrupt and unworthy as in age after age they have often been, into that awful solitude where the soul is alone with God.

In this book there is no attempt to thrust a man that shall die — a man himself laden with imperfections, and who may not even be a good specimen of an ordinary man — between the soul and its Eternal Creator. There is no vulgarizing of the emotions to human eyes, no wearing of the soul upon the sleeve for daws to

peck at, no dabbling of the profane hand of man in the secrets of the Microcosm. The "Imitation of Christ" sends the penitent to neither church nor council, nor pope nor priest, nor saint nor angel, but to its Eternal God. It says, Go fearlessly, O Prodigal! and clasp thy Saviour's very feet. It recognizes the fundamental truth, that "no man may deliver his brother, nor make agreement unto God for him; for it costs more to redeem their souls, so that he must bear that alone forever."

2. We may learn from it a most needful warning against the perils that beset an age of ease. Thousands have come, I know not how, to imagine that heaven may, so to speak, be "won in an easy-chair," and that crowns of victorious amaranth will be dropped quite naturally on the dozing foreheads of the lounging, the idle, and full-fed. It is not so; it never can be so. Life is a warfare in which there is no discharge.

“Shall we be carried to the skies
On slumberous beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed thro’ bloody seas?”

Not so! the body must be subdued, and the flesh mortified; the passions mastered; the cross taken; the race run; the battle fought. We must ever be on the watch against gradual and against sudden temptation; against sin when it approaches as a creeping serpent,—all noiseless glitter and secret fascination,—and when it crashes out upon us, “terrible and with a tiger’s leap.” We are naturally prone to sinful self-indulgence. We must strive to enter in at the strait gate, nor can we acquire our own souls without long, strenuous effort. A lax view of sin, as this book will teach us, is a false view of sin.

“A spotless child sleeps on the flowering moss:
’Tis well for him: but when a sinful man,
Envyng such slumber, may desire to put
His guilt away, shall he return to peace

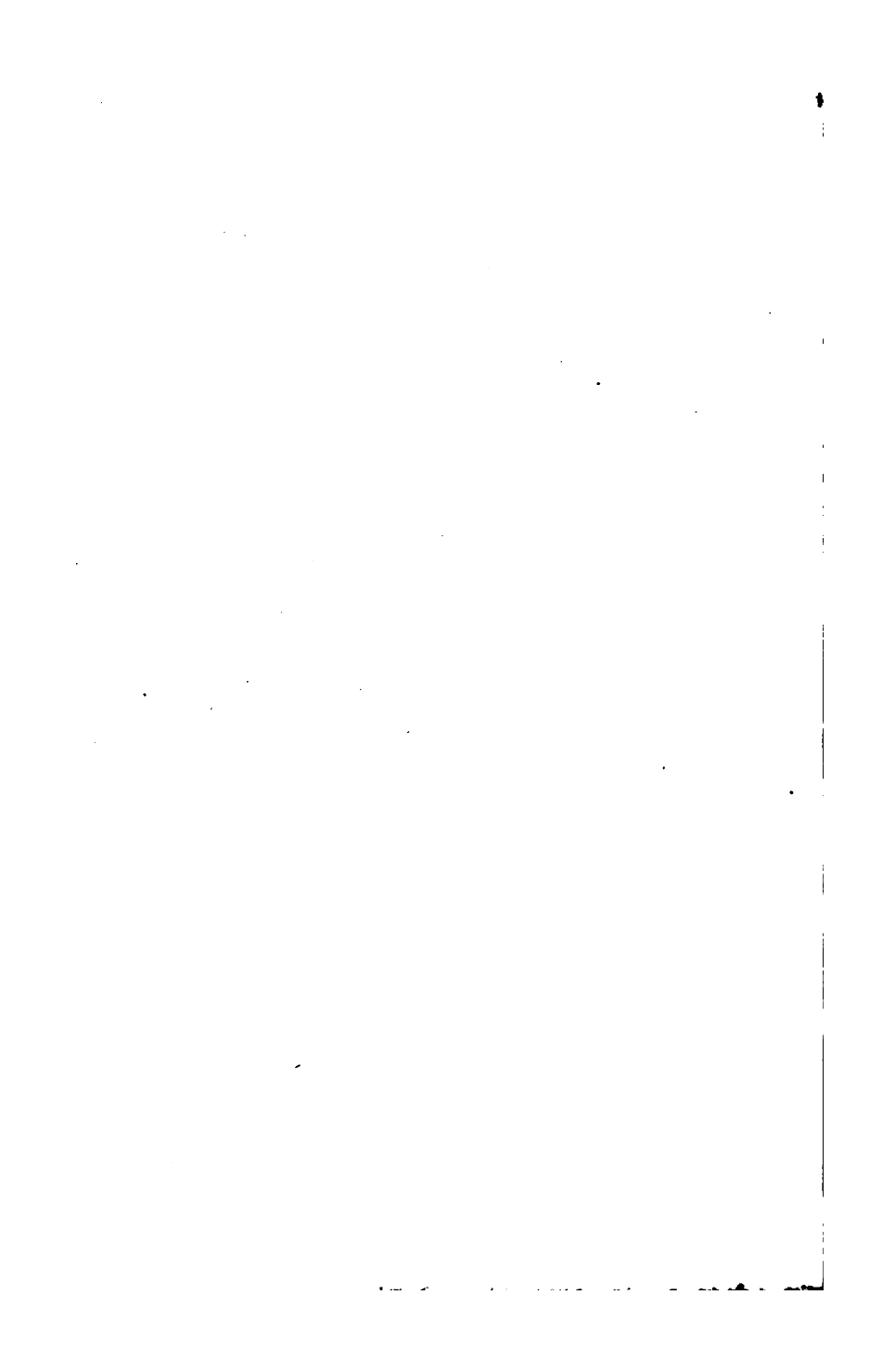
At once by lying there? Our sires knew well
The fitting course for such: dark cells, dim lamps,
A stone floor one may writhe on like a worm,
No mossy pillow blue with violets."

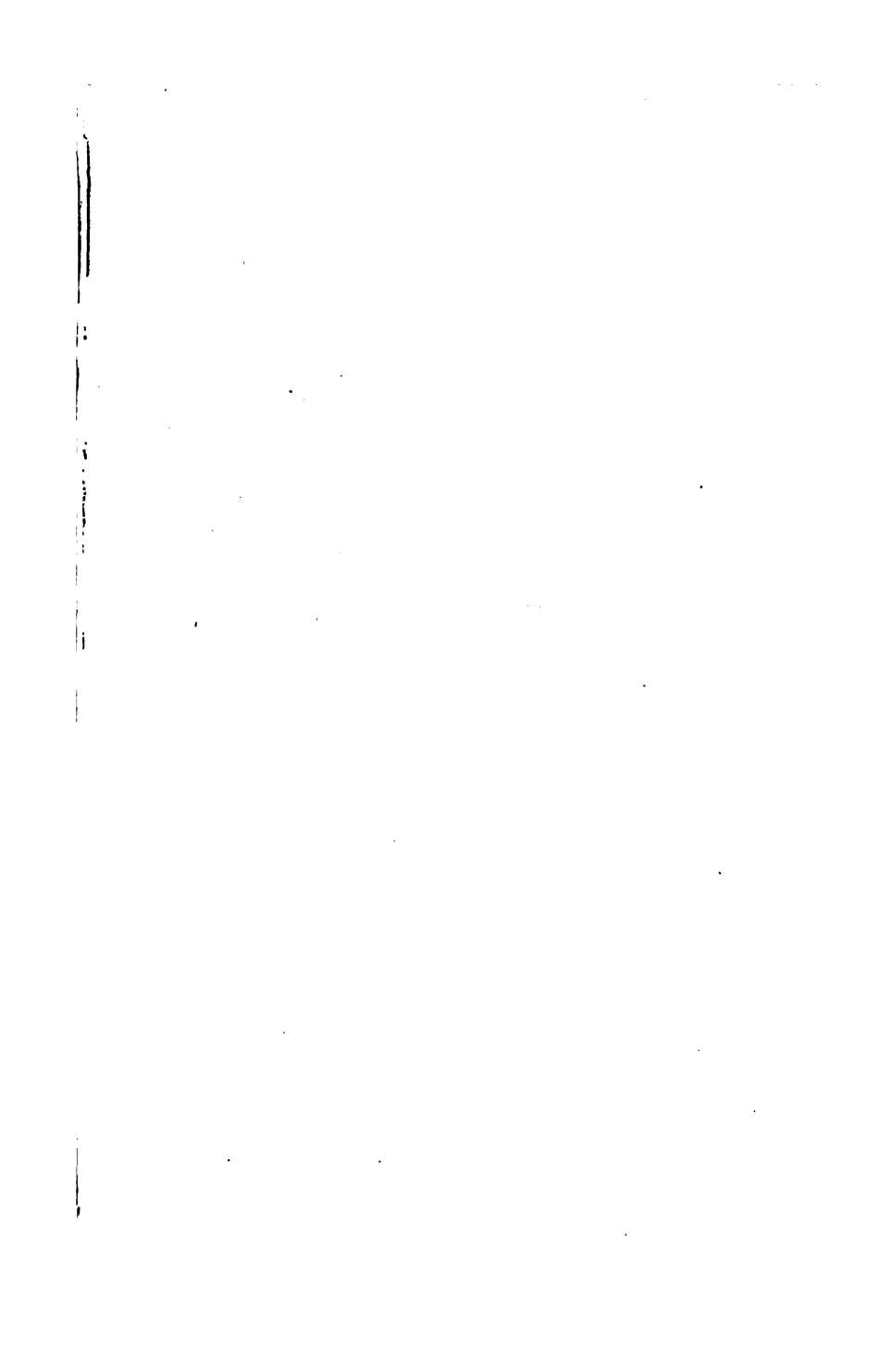
These are two of the great lessons of life which this book will teach us, — the duty and privilege of going direct to God; the peril of a careless and easy and unwatchful life, that lives only to eat and drink and sleep, and get money, and indulge its own evil desires. But no purely human book is perfect. The "*Imitatio Christi*" is too sad, too little cognizant that God allows and wishes us to live, not only under "the tenebrous avenues of Cypress," but also in the glad natural light of His countenance, in a world "wrapped round with sweet air, and filled with sunshine, and abounding in knowledge." It teaches also too great a self-absorption in the working out of our own salvation with fear and trembling. We must not "expand our selfishness to infinitude," and call that religion. We must

ever remember that love to God is most acceptably shown by love to our fellowmen. On these defects I will not dwell. The author of the "Imitation of Christ," was a saint; yet the saints are but, as Luther said, "shining dewdrops on the head of the Bridegroom, lost in the glory of his hair." Their brightest lustre is but as the dim earthshine reflected from our planet upon the unilluminated orb of its crescent satellite. All other teaching, however saintly, can but bring home to us *a part* of the Divine teaching of Christ. It requires to be corrected and completed by Him, the Very Word of God. Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou only — Thou forever — Thou hast the words of Eternal Life.

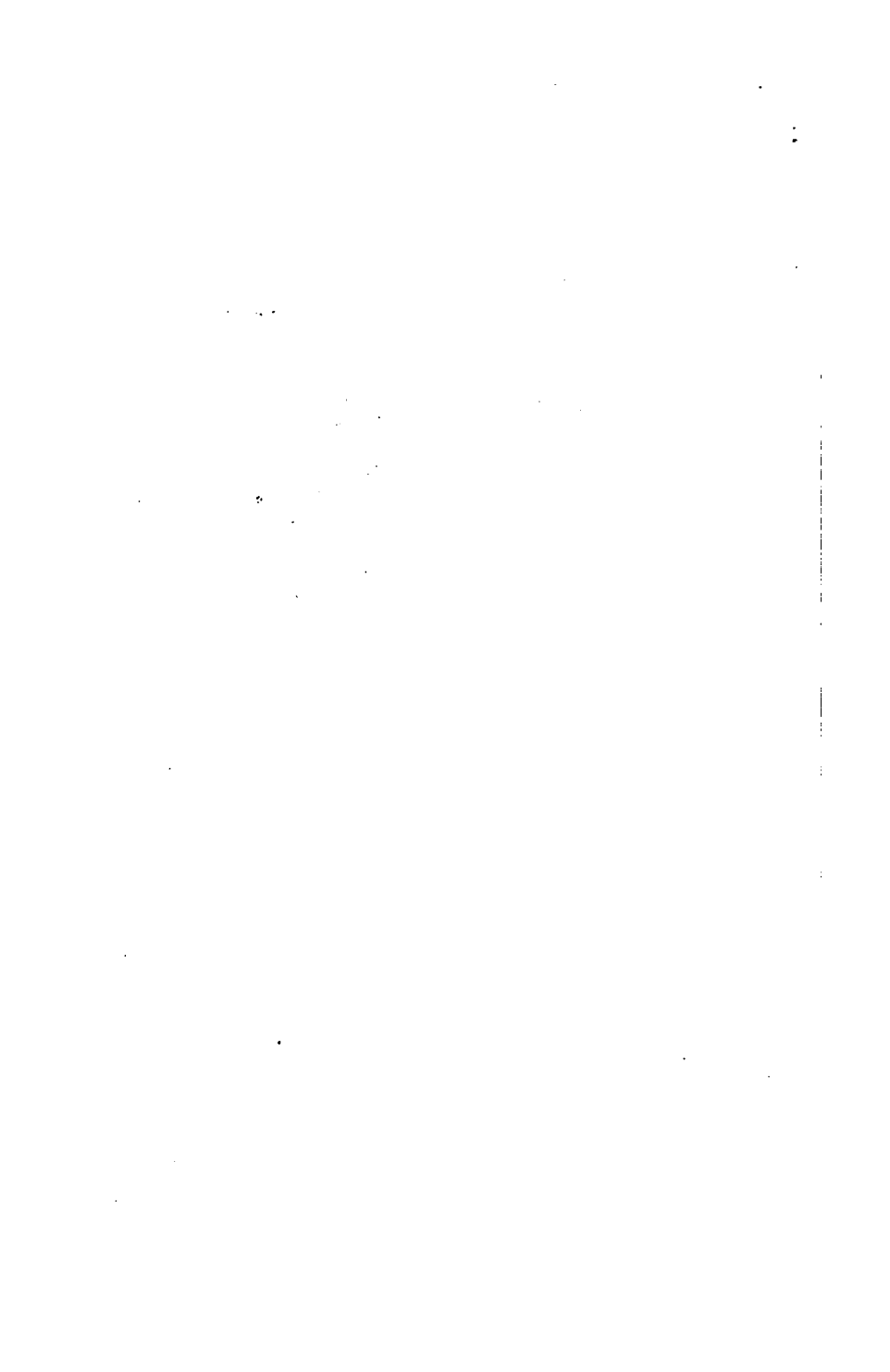
"Yea thro' life, thro' death, thro' sorrow and thro'
sinning,

Christ shall suffice us, for He hath sufficed;
Christ is the end, for Christ was the beginning,
Christ the beginning, for the end is Christ.









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